



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





600056094U



[The page contains a large, solid black rectangular area, likely representing a redacted image or a placeholder for content.]



EFFIE'S FRIENDS.



• •

EFFIE'S FRIENDS;

OR,

CHRONICLES

OF

THE WOODS AND SHORE.



Fair



LONDON:

JAMES NISBET & CO., 21, BERNERS STREET.

1865.

250. m. 234.

THE
LIBRARY OF THE
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
1000 MUSEUM AVENUE
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10028



CONTENTS.



	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	I
THE SWALLOW'S STORY	13
THE PEACOCK'S STORY	55
THE SPARROW'S STORY	77
THE SEAGULL'S STORY	115

Oh, the sunny summer-time !
Oh, the leafy summer-time !
Merry is the bird's life,
When the year is in its prime.
Birds are in the water-falls,
Dashing in the rainbow spray ;
Everywhere, everywhere,
Light and lovely, there are they !
Birds are in the forest old,
Building in each hoary tree ;
Birds are on the green hills ;
Birds are on the sea !

HOWITT.



AS usual, Effie was quite alone.

It was too sunny for the sea-shore to-day ; too breathless and sultry for the open park, where the deer gathered underneath the trees, and the cattle waded knee-deep in the lake.

Hours ago, while the dew still lay upon the grass, Effie gathered the heap of wild flowers which lay upon her lap. Now she was resting, sheltered from the noonday sun.

She sat at the top of a flight of jagged steps cut in the hill-side, surrounded by rough masses of rock and broad-leaved ferns. The trickling of water lulled her, as it fell tinkling into a little stone basin, green with moss and feathered with maiden's-hair.

It was called the Wishing Well, and the rock where she now sat was Effie's woodland throne. She looked at her kingdom through a golden haze, and the broken shadows of the trees slept beneath her feet.

It was not to listen for a step or voice that Effie sat so

still : none ever broke her solitude. But she heard music in the summer air, and saw pictures in the clouds.

Will you see the picture that lies before her now ? An atmosphere all blue and gold above, and shades of green with purple or grey shadows underneath. The stream winding away with many a silver splash and eddy through the trees. A long forest glade, cool and dark, except where patches of sunlight flecked the grass ; at the end an old manor-house, all gable ends and mullioned windows, red once, weather-beaten to a deep brown now. This was Effie's home. The low sound of the tide lapping against the cliffs came faintly, carried by the lazy air. Early and late Effie haunted the sea-shore and the woods. Always alone, she came and went unquestioned ; "always alone,"—her story was told in those two words.

The little solitary heart, that knew so few people to care for, lavished its stores of love on the flowers and on the birds,—on wild springs bubbling up from the grass in far-away corners of the wood,—on the bees that carried on their brisk honey trade among the beds of fragrant thyme and the clustering honeysuckles.

These were Effie's friends. She counted time by the ebb and flow of the tide, by the length of the shadows and the falling of the dew.

The note of every bird was to her as the voice of a friend. From the nightingale, whose rich notes often sang her to sleep at night, to the scream of the sea-bird which warned her of stormy weather coming on the coast, Effie knew them all, and loved them.

Scarcely a wild flower grew, but Effie knew its name. The sheltered nook where the snowdrops first peeped out, the hollow near the river where the wet ground was so capital for wild hyacinths, the sunny bank on which she always found her earliest primroses,—all these knew Effie's footstep. Later in the year, bluebells and meadow-sweet, wood anemones and convolvulus, pure lilies-of-the-valley, flaunting poppies, and a hundred others, left the wood in Effie's basket, or made wreaths round her broad hat.

Yet there came a wistful look sometimes into her dark eyes. Perhaps it was because, long years ago, her mother's last smile had faded from her sight, and unconsciously its memory haunted her still. Once Effie scarcely knew what it was to be alone ; that tender, fostering love was almost forgotten ; yet a something—she scarcely knew what—was missing to the little queen of the woodlands.

After her mother's death, the old manor-house grew too sad and solitary for her father. He also went away.

Effie dimly remembered kisses pressed upon her forehead, and burning tears that had fallen on her wondering face. Her father went abroad, and left her in the old red manor-house beside the sea. His brother and his sister lived there still ; but "Uncle Walter" was a scholar and an author, who rarely left his books ; and "Aunt Lettice" had long been an invalid.

It was then that Effie began to live alone, and to turn to Nature as her nurse and friend.

A dreary silence seemed to hang over the house. But

few of the rooms showed signs of habitation by opened windows and raised blinds. To one of these windows Effie's wandering feet sometimes carried her. Clambering upon the broad stone ledge, she could see into the room—a sombre library, where long ranges of books stretched away in dim perspective along the walls. A table, heaped up with books and papers, stood in the oriel window; and a man sat there writing—always writing. Effie used to watch the rapid hand with a sort of awe; but that the words she thus saw traced went out into the world, and covered the name she herself bore with fame—of that little Effie never dreamed.

There was another room, round an angle of the house, into which Effie sometimes went.

It would have been a very bright room if the sunshine had not been so carefully excluded. A fire smouldered there all through the warm spring days, and to Effie there was a strange heaviness in the perfumed air. She used to steal quietly round the Indian screen, and kiss the pale face that lay back among the cushions of the couch.

“Aunt Lettice's” kiss in return was generally accompanied by a nervous glance at the heavy curtains shading the door which led into the library. She held Effie's hand, and warned her, in a low voice, not to disturb Uncle Walter. So Uncle Walter wrote on in the library, and Aunt Lettice rested in her shaded room. Effie disturbed neither, but betook herself to the woods.

On the other side of the manor-house a broad terrace overhung the shore. The sea-wind swept up to it, and

the broad waters lay glittering beneath. The terrace was grass-grown, and its walls broken and covered with grey lichen. One of Effie's friends, a peacock, sunned himself on the worn-out flight of steps. Perhaps she would only have called him an acquaintance, for she was not very fond of him, and treated him with a haughtiness that she seldom used among her subjects.

The fountain was choked with water-lilies, and the figures on the sun-dial were effaced by damp and age, as if Time had grown weary of chronicling his flight.

Here Effie liked to watch the sunset, to scatter barley for the peacock, and to coax the sparrows to feed out of her hand.

The shadows had stolen quite a great bit of grass from the sunshine before Effie moved. She rose at last, and going to the Wishing Well, took up an iron cup that was fastened to the rock by a rusty chain.

Now, there was an old story about the Wishing Well; a half-forgotten, fanciful legend told, that those who came to drink there when the sun was at a certain height on Midsummer Day, would find the wishes which they formed come true. Unwittingly, Effie fulfilled now the conditions of the promise. It was Midsummer Day, and the mystic hour, when she dipped the cup into the basin.

As she bent down, a shadowy face seemed to rise towards her from the clear depths of the water—a pretty childish face, with soft eyes, and rosy lips half parted. Effie started back for a moment before she recognised her own image.

"I wish I had a friend to talk to me and play with me," she thought, as she leaned forward again, and raised the sparkling water to her lips; "I wish—oh, so much!—that I were not always alone."

She let the cup fall back into the fountain with a splash, gathered up her wild flowers, and went away.

Down the forest glade, past the house, she went, on to the terrace, where the peacock revelled to-day in a perfect blaze of sunshine. She lay down in the shade cast by a solemn cypress. Broad daylight as it was, a nightingale began to sing, and the waves beat a drowsy accompaniment upon the sands.

Effie fell asleep, and dreamed of her dead mother. It was a happy dream.

She thought her mother came towards her smiling, and bent down to take her in her arms. Effie rested in the dear clasp, so nearly forgotten, so well remembered now. She looked up to meet the tender, smiling eyes.

"Tell me about your life, my child," she heard; "tell me who are your friends. Who loves my Effie best now?"

"I have no friends. Nobody loves me, nobody plays with me," Effie said suddenly, and awoke.

"Effie!"

Who spoke? Not the voice of her dream, for Effie was awake now.

"Effie!" called the voice again, sweet and clear; high up in the air it seemed.

"Effie!" said a little voice, close at hand, "you are a darling!"

"Effie!"—now the voice came from the terrace—"come and look at me." This voice was harsh and a little pompous, but kindly.

Uncle Walter just then came along the terrace. He walked slowly, with folded arms, and bent head. Effie forgot to wonder why he had left his books, why he came towards her. "They are calling me!" she exclaimed aloud. "Uncle Walter, they are calling me!"

The scholar awoke suddenly to outward things. "What do you mean, child?" he said; "no one called you."

But Effie's bright gaze was turned upwards to the sky, and the smile upon her lips was so joyous, that her uncle's gaze was rivetted upon her face. A strange gleam of brightness from the "long ago" passed before his eyes. Childhood, sunshine, musical laughter—how far away they seemed! It was only for a moment.

"There again! Don't you hear them? In the sky, in the wood, they are calling to me to come!"

"Child," said Uncle Walter, very gravely, "you are dreaming. I hear nothing but the scream of the sea-gull, and the harsh cry of the peacock, and the twittering of the swallows from that yew hedge."

But Effie laughed loud and cheerily.

"It is the birds!" she cried. "They are talking to me in their language, and I understand it every word. I shall never be lonely any more—they all say so. They are to be my friends."

"What do they say?" asked the scholar, absently, his thoughts already far away.

Effie listened; then turned with a half-laugh and blush. "It is only the sparrow, you know, Uncle Walter. You won't mind what he says."

"No."

"Well," said Effie, shyly. "He told me to follow his example, and not to care about my uncles. He says he never did, and that his father never had the smallest regard for him. And he says"—Effie's voice changed—"that his mother is dead, too."

"Ah!" said Uncle Walter, looking at her, "anything more?"

"He advises me to go and eat gooseberries," reported Effie, laughing; "and he promises to tell me the story of his whole life. Uncle Walter, I must go. They say we could talk more comfortably in the woods. They are all waiting for me. I cannot stay."

"The power of imagination is very great," began Uncle Walter. "Philosophy teaches us ——"

But Effie never heard what philosophy taught Uncle Walter. She was off to the woods.

There she was soon deep in animated talk. The lark paused in his heavenward flight to welcome her, and then carried her name up among the sailing clouds. The swan floated down the river and bent his stately neck in greeting; the sweet-voiced thrushes and the swallows and the merry robins talked one faster than the other, "and still their speech was song."

Effie asked for the sparrow who had promised her his story.

She was told that he had gone off to inspect some cherries reported to be ripe. "But I can tell you just as good a story," said another sparrow.

"I should like to hear all your stories," answered Effie graciously.

"Ah!" said bold Robin Redbreast, shaking his head, and swelling his little breast until it was redder than ever; "it will not be the first time by a good many that my family has figured in English story. You remember the ballad of 'The Babes in the Wood?' Effie herself sings it sometimes."

"I know it," chirped a small tom-tit, who, being young in the ways of the world, was not yet tired of the robin's favourite story.

"Well, Cock Robin was my ancestor, my great, great—I really forget how many generations back," ended the robin, with a chirp of affected carelessness.

"I believe your family never travelled?" twittered a martin, with his head inquiringly on one side.

"Perhaps not; but what makes you ask?"

"Oh, nothing;" and the martin rose and took a turn in the air. "Only, I thought your reputation was merely local."

Effie grew tired of waiting for the sparrow.

"I suppose you don't happen to have a story to tell?" she said to a swallow, the sweeping circles of whose flight had attracted her attention.

"I think I might have," replied the swallow, meditatively.

"Then I should like to hear it now."

And the swallow's story was the one that Effie listened to in the golden midsummer afternoon.



The Swallow's Story.

Rondinella Pellegrina,
Che ti posi in sul verone,
Ricantando ogni mattina,
Quella flebile canzone,
Che vuoi dirmi in tua favella,
Pellegrina Rondinella ?

TOMMASO GROSSI.





THE hazy light of early morning still lay upon the grey, time-worn buildings and high minster towers of an old cathedral town ; and the sun was rising slowly, alike upon the bishop's palace and the swallows' nest in the roof of one of the houses in the close. A lofty arch at one end led into the close, where the soft carpet of closely-shaven grass was always kept carefully mown and tended. There the shadows thrown from the venerable towers and the stately front of the cathedral slept through the long summer days. A gravel carriage-road bordering the grass led to the principal entrance. Old, highly-ornamented houses, with heavy gothic doors and windows, overhanging roofs, queer niches, and sculptured tablets let into the grey walls, bounded the close on every side.

That quiet cathedral close was my birthplace and earliest home. It is long since I last saw it, and I

have been a wanderer, like all my race, since then ; but nothing I have seen in distant lands is fairer to me than the calm atmosphere of unworldly stillness that seems to rise around me when I look back. I see the long procession of white-robed choristers crossing the close in the sunlight, and hear the steps upon the carriage-road—the echoing sound of the carriages thundering underneath the archway ; occasionally, on still evenings, the distant notes of the organ floating across the close, and the faint harmony of singing voices, scarcely heard before it died away upon the quiet air, yet often mingling in our dreams ; sleepy nestlings as we were in the swallow's home.

I can never fancy it but with the summer sun and summer shade upon it. In winter we were always far away. Though a stay-at-home robin spoke to me once of its dazzling winter dress of snow, the glistening holly-leaves, and bright berries on the trees, I would rather fancy that it was always summer there, or spring, or early autumn, and that the green grass lay in its setting of grey stone, covered by no snowy carpet, but always gemmed with daisies, as on the day when I took my first tumbling flight among them, long, long ago.

Our nest was cosily built beneath the roof of what had once been the organist's house ; and though he had been long dead, it still bore its former name. We could command a view of the whole close, which was all the world to us then. In the long hours every day during which no service was going on in the cathedral, and the sunbeams held solitary reign, we could see into the house itself ; or

else we watched the blossoming of the climbing roses which had twined themselves among the ivy leaves mantling the wall. We and the young rose-buds, and one child whom we saw every day at play, the only young things, seemingly, in the grave old place.

Well, it was morning, a grey morning, that gave fair promise of a sunny day,—at least, so said an old swallow, who knew the world well. He could judge, not only of England's changeful sky, but could read the signs of coming tempests in the cloudless heavens of the South, and had often seen the Nile floods, and felt the burning sirocco in the sandy plains of Egypt. He said the English summer had come early; and when our father and mother flew away, we nestlings, tired of watching their flight through the sunshine, turned to see how the fine morning was welcomed by our friends inside the house.

We looked into the parlour, a low sunny room, with a heavy beam across the ceiling, and a high oaken mantelpiece, richly carved with wreaths of flowers and fruit. The room was wainscoted with oak, polished and black with age. One of the lattice windows, with diamond-shaped panes of glass, was open, and opposite to it an organ stood against the wall.

Early as it was, breakfast was already laid, and a young girl had just placed a large bunch of roses on the table. She stood for a moment, glancing with a look of satisfaction at the pretty effect of her labours, and carefully smoothing the folds of a long white mantle which hung upon her arm.

looked eagerly to Jem for approbation. He smiled as he bent his head, and Bernard sang the long "Amen," putting his arm to its support round his sister's waist.

Ruth knew or thought very little of how small a thing her great event would seem to others, and Jem was scarcely the person to undeceive her. His little history was rather a sad one, full of disappointment. He, too, had been a chorister. Some years ago, he had been praised and much noticed for the beauty of his voice. He sung with his whole heart, for love of music was the ruling passion of his life. He studied, and grew to be thoroughly master of it. He was not very clever in anything else, but gradually the fame of his beautiful singing grew quite established in the town and its neighbourhood. Jem was very happy until, at the end of an unusually hot summer, a fever broke out in the town. Nearly the first victim was the object of Jem's deepest admiration and hero-worship, one of the principal singers in the cathedral choir. He had a tenor voice, so sweet and sad, that it went straight to the hearts of all who heard him sing.

Jem had made him into an ideal, and to receive from him a word or smile made him happy for the whole day. To the world in general, apart from his singing, he was only a quiet, hard-working bookseller. To Jem he was "our tenor," and the hero of all his dreams.

Touched and amused by the boy's devotion, the singer had been kind to him. When he fell ill, Jem insisted on going to nurse him. There he remained, faithful and very awkward, until his friend died.

Then poor Jem lay down to fight his own battle with the dreaded fever. He was very ill, and all the time he had such odd delirious fancies about thoroughbass, and tenor clefs, raving of chromatic scales and solos in B flat, until he almost frightened his simple mother away from his bedside.

He got well again, but his voice was gone. Jem never sang in his dear cathedral again. He went away sadly to his home, a farmhouse among the hills, and his place among the choristers was empty, and his name very soon forgotten. He said little about it, but his old passionate love of music remained, although his voice never returned.

He learned to play upon the organ of the little village church, and tried hard to teach the school children to sing. It was he who first discovered that little Bernard possessed the beautiful but, to him, sad gift of song. From that time he devoted himself to him, loving him not only with a master's proud fondness for a pupil, but also with a sort of reverence for the child's pure thoughtful nature, his beauty, and his earnest ways.

The deep tones of the cathedral clock startled the little party as they still lingered round the organ. "It is time to go," said Jem.

Bernard was soon ready in his little white surplice, looking very innocent and fair and young, with his slightly flushed cheeks and golden hair. Jem hovered round him, smoothing out the folds of the surplice carefully again and again. "Oh! Claude," whispered Ruth, as she drew him aside; "don't you think he looks very

like an angel?" Claude smiled, and gave Ruth a look that quite satisfied her. She kissed little Bernard, and then he went away with Jem. Claude and Ruth followed together, and for a long time the house was quiet and deserted.

They looked very happy when they came back, though they said little at first; but Claude lingered in the sunny parlour, instead of going off to work in his studio as usual. By-and-by, standing by the old lady's chair, I heard those two, Claude and Ruth, tell her how it had been. They told how more than usually solemn and peaceful the cathedral had looked to them, and how the sunlight came streaming in through the high windows, and rested like a glory on Bernard's golden hair and white dress. They told how Jem had got in a corner, and gazed wistfully when the choristers came in until Bernard passed, and then he quite forgot himself, and said afterwards that he had not felt so proud and happy since the fatal day when the fever took away his voice.

"And Ruth," Claude said, "stood beside me quite trembling, and turning white and red at first; but by the time the anthem came, she was her own brave, quiet self again."

"And then"—Ruth took up the story—"and then we heard his voice. Oh, granny! it rose clear and steady above all the others, and seemed to go ringing high up into the air. I am sure it is not only because he is my own that I thought so, for there was a great silence all through the cathedral; and as for Jem, he fairly broke down and cried, with his hands over his eyes, and——"

"And Ruth listened with the tears streaming down her face," said Claude, with a smile.

"It was the first time," said Ruth. And turning away, she added: "It was not only that his voice was so beautiful, but the thought that my great wish was granted, and that I heard my darling singing praise to God."

Claude's studio was one of the rooms which I liked best to watch. It was at the back of the house, and ran nearly the whole length of it. I suppose it did not belong to the original building, but had been built on for some purpose now forgotten, for though more modern than the rest, it had a venerable look, and was almost entirely covered with ivy. It was long, as I have said, and had no ceiling, the rafters having been arched to form the roof, and left uncovered in the inside. The windows were high up in the wall, and draped with crimson baize curtains—Ruth's work—so disposed as to let the daylight stream in, in a subdued artistic manner. A large arm-chair, pushed out of the way, was the only furniture, except the numerous casts and models, and a few easels on which stood Claude's pictures, and two or three Italian paintings—a dreamy landscape by Claude Lorraine, and the grave, beautiful head of a Madonna by Guido—which had descended to Claude from his Italian mother.

Claude was alone in the world. His father, who died young, was an artist like himself; his mother the beautiful daughter of an Italian picture-dealer, whom he had married at Rome. Claude was more like one of the early Italian painters I have heard of than those of modern

time. He was absorbed in his art, throwing into it much of that spirit of enthusiasm and devotion which was part of his nature. Painting and religion were nearly allied in his mind, and before he began to paint he often knelt down to pray.

The quiet and peaceful simplicity of the cathedral town suited him well. Morning and evening he was among the little knot of worshippers at the daily service.

I have often watched him as he came out of his studio, and known by his troubled and weary looks that his work had not gone on well. But then he turned into the cathedral, and when he came out the same expression of repose had come across his face that it wore when he looked at Ruth.

I used to watch him through one of the high windows as he stood painting, earnest and absorbed, a stream of sunshine pouring in through the half-shaded window, the rest of the room in shadow.

Very often Bernard was there, and though Claude spoke little to him, he liked having him.

The child was silent and quiet, watching the painting, or standing before one of Claude's copies of the very early masters—pictures with clear, stiff outlines, and peaceful faces crowned with a golden glory.

Bernard himself was a fit subject for an artist.

There was one small painting, half finished, before which, as often as she came into the studio, Ruth never failed to stand. Underneath it were the words, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." It was a picture of the

young Samuel, when he heard himself called at midnight. The rapt, listening look rested on his face like the dawn of the prophet-life within him. Claude had drawn him with Bernard's drooping hair, his white massive brow, and clear deep eyes.

Now and then Jem came to look on while this was being painted, stealing softly in, as if a loud step or voice would break the spell of the place, and invariably entangling himself in some of the easels which he avoided with such elaborate care. Claude liked him, and always looked round with a nod or a smile to welcome him ; and sometimes Jem was made happy by being asked to play on the organ for him while he painted.

This picture was the occupation of Claude's leisure hours during this happy summer,—happy to them all, especially so to him, for he had never been in any place that was so like a home before.

A great part of his life had been spent in Italy, and he was to return to Rome to study in the autumn. Last winter he had wandered home to England, and though he had few relatives to welcome him, yet he soon ceased to feel himself a stranger. There was something peculiarly fascinating and soothing to him in little Bernard's grave composure, and in the quiet brightness of Ruth's looks and ways, so different from the varying, impetuous nature he had inherited with his Italian blood.

Well! these were my first friends. We swallows, who consider the owners of the roof under which we build to be under our especial guardianship, loved them very



much, unconscious of it though they were. Ah! how many who call themselves friendless have watchful love and care around them, although they know it not!

Meanwhile, as the time passed on, and indoors they talked, and sang, and painted, we in the swallows' nest were growing stout and strong. We were seldom in the nest now all day. At first we were ranged in a long line upon the top of the house, and looked down, half afraid, half proud, and very giddy, upon the ground below. Then—and this was a grand step—we were safely landed on a tree; and our father and mother, never going far away from us, flew about, busily hawking for flies to feed the hungry troop of little ones perched on their bough, or tumbling about among the daisies on the grass.

We had gone on from this to take long flights all round the close, mounting higher and higher as we increased in strength, until the nest was far below, and the cathedral tower seemed no longer to rise in unapproachable majesty above us.

At last (I remember it so well!), one soft, sunny day, there had been a quick shower, and the roses each bore a sparkling gem upon their leaves. The sun had come out again brilliantly, and the lingering rain-drops glanced in its light. All the earth looked so fresh, so joyous, that I felt my heart grow lighter and more buoyant as I rose from the silver-spangled turf. It was a free, thrilling feeling, as trees and buildings seemed to fly beneath me. A great longing to see the gladsome outer world came over me. The close was far behind me now, my wings were

strong, and my flight swift and steady. The smell of the flowers and the song of the birds came gladly up from the rejoicing earth. I flew far, then looked around. It was my first sight of anything beyond my home ; and there, in one burst, I saw the full sweep of open country spread out beneath me. There were the fresh, breezy downs, with the heather in full bloom, in bold, clear lines of hill and valley ; there were woods in all their summer glory, full of chequered light and shade ; there were broken bits of common, covered with yellow gorse ; there were flowery hedges too ; and haymakers were tossing the sweet hay about in the fields round their white cottages near village churches, that looked so small to me.

Above all, to the southward I could see a broad, glittering silver band. There lay the waters of the sea, and the sunlight fell straight upon them, like a bright path across the trembling waves. That solemn horizon line was as the future to me. Beyond it lay the scenes of my life to come—across the sea that I had dreamed of, but had never seen before.

I was too young, though, and too happy, to look forward. The birds were singing until the very air seemed to thrill with gladness, and myriads of insects were dancing on the surface of a merry little stream. I stooped, and for a moment dipped beneath the clear wavelets ; then rising again, and shaking a shower of diamonds from my wings, I joined my soft swallow's notes to the woodland music. After that, we flew far every day, and nestled in the old home by night.

Often when I returned home Ruth sat working in the window, and Claude leant against the shutter beside her. When it grew dark, and she could no longer see the stitches, they used to sit together in the twilight, Bernard generally on a low stool at his sister's feet; and Claude talked to them of Italy, and of his other home at Rome.

Even their old grandmother dropped her knitting on her lap and listened, as Claude told of the solemn cypress groves, the sparkling fountains, and the gleaming statues of the land he loved so well. He told them of the quaint buildings, the narrow streets, and the stately palaces of Rome; of the half-buried ruins, and the wild-flowers that have crept smiling over them; above all, of the mournful beauty of the desolate Campagna, with its line of broken arches and its wealth of ruined tombs standing out against the sky.

Claude spoke of many wanderings among its lonely hills and valleys, where dark groups of stone-pines alone broke the undulating line of desert country, and now and then you came upon a solitary tower or tomb, or to a little rocky gorge, where the ground was blue with violets. "I used to lose myself," Claude said; "it was so quiet after the busy studio, and I had no one from whom I could ask my way, and no landmark but the dome of St. Peter's to guide me home."

We had other stories, too, of galleries, and pictures, and churches. Perhaps these were his favourites, and the most often told; but I think I cared most to hear of the

lonely Campagna, and of the free wind which blew across it from the hills.

I was never tired of listening to these evening talks. There was a voice within me that echoed back Claude's words, and called me out to see the distant lands of which he spoke. They seemed to blend and chime in strangely with the songs which had often lulled me to sleep, and with the dreams that sometimes came to me in the starlighted nights.

Beautiful as it was here, in the country we called home, there was a longing in my heart for something still beyond. I knew I should visit those lands some day; and as I mused upon them more and more, I wished the time were come. But sunny golden days and warm soft nights succeeded each other, and the foliage still waved in all its rich luxuriance, untouched by wind or frost; and I thought autumn would never come.

I asked an old swallow, at last—a father in our tribe. His wing was weak now, and his eye dim, and the days of his journeyings were nearly over. I asked him if midsummer were not past, and when winter would bring our summons to those lands whither I was impatient to be gone. "The cuckoo is already gone," I said; "shall we not soon follow?"

"Oh, wait!" he answered; "wait, and be patient. You are young now, and the world lies all bright and happy before you—you scarcely know how bright. Winter will come soon enough, to you and to all. Rest in the sunny present. The day will come when your longing will be

accomplished, and perhaps you will learn that granted wishes do not always make us happy. I am old," he added, "and in a long life I have learnt one lesson :— when the sun sets in the evening, I do not trouble myself about what will come when it has risen again ; and when the sky is blue and free from clouds, I do not fear for the storms that must overshadow it some day. And now my wing is heavy, and my flight slow and weak. I know not how I am to follow you in your journey across the sea ; but I am not afraid, for help has always come to me when I have needed it ; and if I ever look forward, it is with hope and trust."

And he was right ; for before the time of our winter flight was come, the old swallow did not need faith and patience any longer.

It must have been soon after this, that coming home late one evening, I looked as usual into the parlour. Bernard was reading to his grandmother by the fast waning light, and in the window Ruth stood listening silently to the low tones of Claude's voice. He was speaking very earnestly.

"Ruthie," interrupted little Bernard, and she started as he spoke, "we have finished our book, and granny has dropped two stitches of her knitting. Will you come and put it to rights, and find us a new book ?"

Ruth went to him directly. One minute she stood silently before the bookcase ; but her grandmother did not see that her eyes were full of tears, as she gave the work to her with a kiss.

She went back to Claude, and said, very low, "You see they want me too, dear Claude. I cannot leave them."

I could not hear Claude's answer, but he took her hand, and spoke eagerly; perhaps he told her that her people should be his people, for I know that when Ruth knelt alone in her room that night she prayed for her betrothed.

They all seemed happier than ever after that. There were no thoughts of Ruth's leaving them, only a bright hope for a future that was far away still, but in which she and Claude rested calmly, with full confidence in each other.

Now the time glided on, and no one paused to mark how rapidly it was passing away.

At last there came shorter days, and the nights were long and chilly. The blackberries were ripe, and the butterflies no longer danced in the sunshine. Flower after flower faded, and the gaudy ones that remained seemed to be trying in vain to wile us into forgetting the departed brightness. So gradually that at first we scarcely noticed it, the rich foliage was thinning; the woods were putting on their autumn tints; and the wind which used to whisper so softly to the green leaves, now, like a false friend, went whistling past them in their decay, scattering them all brown and withered upon his path. And then I knew that summer was over. There were grave faces and changes in the house, too, for as winter approached Claude was to leave it.

The last days of his stay were very quiet ; but though there were few words spoken, he and Ruth often looked at each other as if their hearts were full. Now and then he spoke hopefully of the future, and talked of the happy days which would come back with the summer weather. Ruth answered him with smiles that affection and unselfishness strove to render bright.

The last time I saw them together, they were walking up and down after the evening service. Ruth was speaking softly and very earnestly. She told Claude how she would pray for him, especially in the cathedral of which he had grown to be so fond. "For you may think of me there every evening," she said, with a smile. "I sometimes fear that it is too full of earthly thoughts to me, now that everything speaks of you and Bernard ; but I hope not, for it is good to be where every thought is turned into a prayer."

And then she spoke of the lonely life to which he was returning, and her voice faltered. But still she bade him have faith and courage, and, if bright days were slower in coming than he had hoped, to wait still and to trust. I wondered as I heard the old swallow's lesson repeated again by Ruth.

Claude's words were more broken, full of the pain of leaving her, yet of thankfulness for the happiness he had found.

How they parted at last I scarcely know ; but when the last "God bless you !" had been uttered, Ruth stood watching with clasped hands until the train was out of

sight ; and she returned to the quiet tenor of her everyday life with a face that was not exactly sorrowful, but more like the sun trying to shine through a cloud, and to turn its edges to silver.

And now the time for our flight was indeed come. The note of preparation sounded often during those busy autumn days. Flocks of swallows and martins were assembling fast in the close, clustering and hovering, on still mornings and sunny evenings, on roofs and trees, and round the towers of the cathedral.

Every evening there was a conference to decide when and where we should go. And then I knew what the home was to me which I once wished to leave.

Little Bernard stood watching the myriads of birds one evening, as they flew aimlessly from tree to tree before settling for the night.

"Ruth !" he called, "the swallows are going."

Ruth came and looked too. "They will go to Italy," said Bernard. "Perhaps they will see Claude."

"Good-bye, swallows !" said Ruth, lingering after her brother had moved away—"good-bye ! and if you see Claude in your distant flight, go near him, to remind him of your old home and his."

Ruth did not know, as she smiled to herself, how earnestly we had listened to her words, and how firm a purpose arose in my mind to seek Claude in Italy. I never forgot it.

The last day came and went. The sun sank and the twilight gathered. Then the moon shone softly and

sadly, and I watched all the changes that passed over the dear old place.

Morning broke again. I saw the highest spire of the cathedral tipped with clear red light ; but by the time the sunshine had stolen like a smile over the grey buildings, we were far away. Calmly, tenderly, peacefully, I remembered it long afterwards, with its silent bells and deserted cloisters. The flight of our band passed noiselessly through the air, and left the echoes unawakened in the old home we had quitted.

We rested one more night on English ground before we flew away. The day of our departure was so warm and soft, that it seemed almost unnecessary to go. But the day was come and the hour ; and, like a morning cloud, the tribe of wanderers rose to their seaward flight. Higher and higher we flew in the still air, our course steered away from England straight for sunny France, and for the lands of hope which lay beyond.

Once, when we had flown a long way, I rested on the wing and looked back. Above me was the wide blue sky, beneath the wide blue sea, and far behind us now, growing fainter and fainter still, lay the white cliffs we had left. It was Sunday morning. From the churches scattered along the shore we could hear the chimes of the bells ringing for morning service. It came pealing across the calm waters, the distant sorrowful music, now swelling and now dying away—England's farewell to the outward bound.

After we crossed the sea our flight was swift and

steady. We went far in a few days, and quickly reached the plains that lie along the southern shores of France. Nothing but the Alps was between us and Italy. We reached their foot one evening ; and on the morrow, closing night found us still in the midst of a wild mountain pass.

The mountains, rising high on every side, hid the setting sun, but we saw the reflection of rosy light cast over the eastern side of the valley. The masses of rock, and the pine-trees and firs clinging to their sides, were tinted with soft pink radiance. Gradually it faded, and then the daylight floated away after it ; and the shadow of darkness fell, first upon the fissures and clefts in the mountain, then deepening and spreading, until dusk rested on the valley.

We could still see the outline of the heights towering against the sky, and the white torrent foaming over the rocks beneath us. Far above, a dim line of intense whiteness showed the region of perpetual snow. We had gathered for the night among a group of firs that grew on the mountain side, their straight branches overhanging the precipice, some of them half uprooted by fallen rocks or by the avalanches of years before. I shivered in the keen mountain air, and tried in vain to nestle comfortably among the pointed fir leaves. I felt small and cold ; and when voice after voice ceased the timid little twitter that seemed quite out of place in that alpine solitude, I sat awe-struck and wakeful, looking out upon the wild scene.

The deep stillness of a mountain night reigned undisturbed. The rush of waters over the rocks beneath us, and the rustle of the wandering wind passing through the pine-woods, seemed only to increase the oppressive hush. There was no moon. Occasionally I fancied I could feel the spray of a torrent, which, falling straight down from the heights above, hurried to join the sheet of tossing waters at its foot.

Weary and sorrowful, I hid my head under my wing, and thought of England and its calmly flowing streams. Very early in the morning, when the sun was beginning to touch the mountain-tops with light, but night still lay upon the valley, we heard a flock of goats going to their pasture along the road beneath us. Their bells tinkled musically as they wound up the rocky path, and a voice following them sang with the wild, clear "jodel" of the mountains. I awoke and listened. Voice and bells passed away in the darkness; but I had heard them in my sleep, and dreamt that they were the far-away chimes of English churches ringing as they bade us farewell.

We travelled on through the fertile plains of North Italy, and then across the Apennines. When we came in sight of a city encircled by blue hills, with many domes rising against the sky, one far higher than the rest, and a swift river winding through the surrounding plains, we knew that it was Rome, and that we had reached a resting-place for the time, at least.

There I looked long for Claude, but for many days in vain. I sought him in the crowded Corso, on the gay



Pincian hill in the evening, and amongst the ilex groves and statues of the French Academy. Then I remembered his stories of the Campagna ; I drank of the water at Egeria's fountain ; I made friends with swallows who lived in the stone-pines of the Villa Doria ; I flew into chill tombs, all silent and gloomy ; but in vain.

At last,—it was almost by accident—I lighted on the high window-sill of an old palazzo, and there, in a large room bare and slightly furnished, I found Claude.

He had been painting. The setting sun was streaming in through the window near which his easel stood, and the sounds from the street far below came up subdued and softened by the distance. The *pifferari* were playing before a shrine of the Virgin on the wall of a house near at hand, and the monotonous chant of a procession of monks was dying away in the distance.

Claude stood gazing at his unfinished work. He was thin and pale. A picture of Ruth, and a bunch of violets in a glass before it, seemed the only connecting links between this lonely room and the ivy-mantled studio that made so strong a contrast to it in his English home.

He turned away from his picture at last, and took up some well-worn letters which lay on the table among his paints and brushes. He read for some time silently, only pausing to look up now and then at Ruth's picture. At last he read half aloud, as if he were trying to recall the well-known voice and tones.

It was strange to see those two home-faces—the one I had looked for so long, and the other that pictured truly

Ruth's calm eyes and smile—and to hear the names of familiar places which Claude scarcely knew as well as I did. He did not guess that an old friend was near him—one who had borne Ruth's love to him faithfully across the sea.

I often saw him after this. Sometimes I crossed his path in his lonely walks, and I have seen him look up and follow my flight with his eyes; so I hope I reminded him of our common home, as Ruth had wished.

Many a time, sitting in the sun among the ruins of the palace of the Cæsars, he read Ruth's letters half aloud. She always spoke of Bernard.

"He is not strong," she wrote once; "very delicate and fragile. He has more than ever his angel's look now, and his voice is even more beautiful. People come from long distances to hear him sing, and the neighbours have grown to call him the little Saint Bernard. He goes to see many people who are ill, or too old to go to church, and reads to them. I cannot tell you in how many houses the little fellow, with his big Bible and his sweet voice, is watched for and always welcome. His old wish to be a missionary is stronger now than ever."

We left Rome soon after this letter came from Ruth, for winter was passing on, and we had still far to go. We flew through many lands; once more we crossed the sea, and, pausing often by the way, reached Egypt and the Nile.

Sometimes I rested for days among the fertile banks of the great river; sometimes I followed the Nile boats

as they passed slowly up the stream. One I followed a long way, I scarcely knew why, except that there was a child on board who reminded me of Bernard. She was not like him—at least, not in feature or complexion—for Bernard's eyes were as blue as this deep Egyptian sky, and hers were dark and dreamy; but through all her Southern gaiety and ardour there beamed the same unearthly look that shone in Bernard's glance, and told they were both near Heaven. I left the Nile boat only when its journey was completed; but I knew that child was near the end of another journey too,—a journey that had been as calm and bright for her all through as the smooth waters of the Nile.

Months afterwards, when we came to Alexandria, on our way north again, we passed a cemetery. Beside a palm-shaded grave, I saw the mother who had watched by the Southern child, kneeling in deep mourning, with her bent head and clasped hands resting on a cross. Alas! alas! that a child should fade and die beneath this warm, bright sky, and in such sunny air; and they say the wind is so keen in England—its winter covering of snow so deep and chill. My little Bernard!

If I turn back to England now, and tell you what had happened there during the long time of our absence, you must not wonder that I speak as if I had seen it all. I have heard the story of those months so often from those who loved Ruth and Bernard, that I feel as if I had been there with them, instead of far away.

The first scene they described to me was in my favourite

wood. It was winter : the leaves were all scattered on the paths, and even the long wreaths of ivy round some of the trees were brown and nipped with frost ; but it was not freezing then. It was a grey, sad, misty day. The clear notes of a solitary robin sounded now and then, and its song rang all through the wood. The place where many sang in summer was so silent now.

Jem and Bernard were going down the path leading to the town. They walked slowly, and as they reached the old well that they called "Ruth's Well," from her having sat to rest there in many of their last summer's rambles, Bernard stopped, and sat down upon the half-ruined stone.

"Let us rest a little while," he said.

"You are very soon tired," said Jem, giving his little companion a wistful look from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"Yes," said Bernard, leaning his head back wearily against the side of the well ; "I am always tired now."

Jem looked at him again, but did not answer ; Bernard gazed up at the wintry sky.

"Yes," he said at last, as if thinking aloud, "I would rather die in the spring ; would not you, Jem ?"

Jem started : the words fell jarringly upon the train of his thoughts. "Die !" he repeated, trying to speak very cheerfully, but betraying himself by an involuntary quiver of anxiety in his voice ; "what made you think of that ? You are too little to think of such grave things, Bernard."

"Too little!" echoed Bernard, with a half smile. "Oh, poor old Jem!"

"Why?" asked Jem, anxiously; "what is it, Bernard?"

"I thought you knew," said Bernard. "Ruth does not; but I hoped you knew it, Jem."

"Knew what?" Jem's voice was quite hoarse and changed. He did know it; he guessed what the answer would be; and yet, when Bernard said quietly, "That I am going to die, old Jem!" the words came upon him with an overwhelming thrill of sorrow, keen as if the thought had never crossed his mind before. He knelt down by Bernard; but when he tried to speak, his voice was gone—the words choked him.

"Don't be sorry," said Bernard presently, and he looked up and stroked Jem's cheek pityingly; "I'm not—at least," and his voice faltered, "only for one thing. Jem, my voice is going away; haven't you noticed? I shall not be able to sing in the cathedral long!" and his head sunk upon his hands. Jem bent over him, and the little chorister felt tears, hotter and faster than his own, fall upon his forehead.

"Never mind," he said, raising his head and smiling: "never mind; perhaps I shall have an angel's voice soon, old Jem."

But Jem's hardly-won self-command had quite given way, and leaning his head upon his arms, he rested on "Ruth's Well," and sobbed aloud.

Bernard was right. The old doctor to whom Jem went in his bewilderment and distress, and who had known

Bernard all his life, could only confirm his words. "I have feared it for some time," he said; "his sister ought to be told."

Jem thought so too. He did not know how to do it; but it was for Bernard's sake, and that gave him courage.

The time and the place were oddly chosen, like most things that poor Jem did. It was in the elm-tree walk, where he and Ruth used to play when they were children. He stopped her on her way to the evening service.

He told her with all a woman's tenderness joined to his own straightforward simplicity; but what he said, or how Ruth listened, Jem never clearly remembered. It was done at last, and he went away half heart-broken to his home among the hills. Long afterwards the remembrance of Ruth's look and voice haunted him.

When Bernard came back from the cathedral that evening, his sister stood at the door waiting for him. She did not speak, but Bernard looked up in her face, and it needed no words to tell that she knew all. She clasped him in her arms, holding him closer and closer to her heart. For a long time both were silent.

"Ruth!" he said anxiously, at last.

"My child!—my own!" whispered Ruth, in a stifled voice.

Bernard laid his head upon her shoulder with a long sigh. There was no need of concealment any more.

"Bernard, are you happy?" asked Ruth, presently.

"Quite—quite now; and you, Ruth?"

She tried to smile, drew his head down again upon her

shoulder, and gave him a long, trembling kiss ; and so they remained until the fire had burnt low. Bernard, weak and weary, fell asleep in her arms, and Ruth sat still, striving to give her darling up to God, while he yet lay warmly nestled near her heart.

For some time longer Bernard still went to the cathedral, for they said he would fail the quicker if the great happiness of his life were to be taken away. His voice had kept all its sweetness, though much of its strength was gone. He seldom sang in the anthem now, but it was happiness enough for him to sit in his old place, to listen to the prayers, and to swell the burden of the long "Amen."

It was on Christmas Day that he sang for the last time. All his strength seemed to have come back to him for the time, as they sang "Glory to the new-born King!" The cathedral was crowded, and clear and flute-like as ever rose the thrilling silver voice.

In the still evening, when the shadows of the winter night had gathered overhead, and the snow was lying freshly fallen on the ground, Bernard passed out of the cathedral. He paused for a moment before the arched entrance of the choir, and looked back. A few lights glimmered like stars along the darkening aisle. The organ was sounding softly as the congregation dispersed, and the echoes of the chant of "Peace, good-will towards men," still floated among the arches of the lofty roof. Bernard turned away. The next day he was very ill : then he rallied again ; but all knew that he was dying.

One evening when Ruth had left the room, he managed to get off his little couch, and slowly crossed the room to the window. Leaning his forehead against the glass, he looked out at the cathedral. It was quite dark ; but he could trace the outline of the building against the dusky sky. Rays of light were streaming through some of the windows, losing themselves in the surrounding darkness.

Bernard looked at it for a long time, his heart full of an unspoken farewell—looked until his eyes were too full of tears to see it any longer. Then he gave up even the wish of ever singing there again, and resigned his will to God's. It was a hard battle, but it was fought and won. When Ruth entered, and came to him anxiously, he looked up smiling.

Time passed on ; winter drew on towards spring. Bernard was growing daily weaker. To lie all day upon his little couch drawn near the blazing fire,—to watch Ruth going to and fro with her light step and gentle face, and to see her very often coming to his side to part his hair upon his brow and kiss him,—to lie silent for long hours together, musing upon many things, with his eyes fixed upon the flickering fire, or upon the wintry sky,—this was Bernard's life now. To see Jem coming in with a hushed step and kind anxious face to visit him, and to listen with closed eyes and folded hands to the solemn, peaceful music that he played for him daily upon the dear old organ,—to watch for the peal of the cathedral bells ringing for service, and in a low tone, true and sweet still, though faint and often broken, to chant to

himself the psalms for morning and evening prayer,—to feel weak and weary often, but always happy,—and when his hand could not bear the weight of his little Bible, to have its sacred words in his mind and in his heart all day,—thus those last days passed on.

When dusk came, and the firelight danced upon the wall, Ruth always laid aside her work and came to sit beside him. They talked together in hushed twilight voices. Sometimes Bernard lay silent, happy in having her beside him, only now and then speaking a low word of fondness, to make her raise her head, and look with her grave, loving eyes into his ow...

It was thus he liked to listen to Jem's music ; or else, if he thought Ruth was not tired, resting in her arms, his head upon her shoulder, and her heart beating against his, soothed and strengthened by the dream-like strains that spoke more of heaven than of earth.

Once he tried to thank Ruth for all that she had been to him. "You never let me miss our mother, Ruth," he began ; but she put her hand upon his lips, and the tears she so rarely shed for herself stopped him.

To Jem he left the fulfilment of what had been the great wish of his own life. He asked him to be a missionary, as he would fain have been himself if he had lived. But Jem was too humble to consent. "I am not good enough," he always answered sadly.

Bernard would rouse himself to explain that God would help him—that he could not be good enough alone, but in God's strength he could. Jem shook his head, but

gradually he was learning to know more of that Strength that was to Bernard a very present Help in trouble.

At last the winter was over, and we were at home again.

We came back to the grave old close, lying half in shadow, half full of sunshine as of old ; back to the grey sky, now brightening into the blue of summer ; back to the spring flowers, awaking to new beauty from their winter sleep—all but one, the little fragile flower whose smile was fading from the earth as the spring blossoms began to bloom.

We were just in time to see Ruth's angel child again. His wish to die in the spring-time was granted. He lived to see us, the heralds of summer, return from our wanderings.

Many of the choristers, who had been Bernard's companions, came often to sing to him during the last weeks of his life. He had made it an especial request that they would come to him when he was dying, to sing to him once more, and to bid him farewell.

They came, in the evening of a day during which Ruth had watched beside him, thinking that every long-drawn struggling breath must be the last. But that was over ; and now pain, and suffering, and sorrow, had passed away from him for ever.

He lay propped up by pillows, as his old companions came one by one to his bed-side. Each as he went away bore with him a few farewell words and a bright dying smile.

Jem was the last. He was quite broken down, and

could only cry helplessly when Bernard's weak hand drew him down to kiss him.

"Old Jem," said little Bernard, softly, "won't you promise me *now*?"

"I am not worthy," said Jem, with a deep sob—"not worthy."

"Not worthy?" echoed Bernard, twining his little white fingers round the big brown hand. "Ruth, dear, you can tell him better than I can. Tell him how he may be worthy."

"Through Christ," Ruth said, gently; "as worthy as *he* can be of heaven!" And she touched her brother's forehead.

Jem hid his face upon the side of the bed.

Bernard kept his eyes fixed upon him, and when Jem looked up at last, and said, "Pray for me," Bernard knew that his request was granted.

"Thank you," he said, gladly. "Thank God; and oh! God bless you, dear old Jem!" So Jem, too, went slowly away, leaving Bernard alone with his sister.

Bernard lay back, looking upwards. He had folded his hands, and as Ruth bent over him she caught a few broken words. It was his last prayer for Jem.

Presently they heard the organ, touched at first by an unsteady hand, but gaining strength as the sweetly modulated voices chimed in, and the music floated on and filled the silent room.

"Take me upon your arm, dear Ruth," whispered Bernard. "Let us listen so once more."

As Ruth knelt down beside him, the cathedral bells began to ring for the evening service, and a smile came over Bernard's face as he heard the well-known peal. The sweet sound of bells, the swelling trembling melody of voices, the solemn holy words, were meet sounds to ring round the little chorister's dying pillow.

"I will arise," they sang at last, "I will arise, and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, Father ——"

The last long note died quivering away. The bells had ceased, but Ruth knelt on. Pillowed upon her arm still lay the golden head, with its sunny scattered hair, and the beautiful calm face, which she had often said looked so like an angel's.

Bernard was dead. They placed flowers and green ivy-leaves in his coffin, and many came to look on him, as he lay with his hands calmly folded, his deep eyes closed, and his wonderful voice hushed for ever.

The rough old verger, whose heart he had won, and who had been so proud of his singing, brought a single white lily, scbbing as he gave it to Ruth. They laid it on his pillow, beside the fair face, that was not less white and pure.

The day before the funeral, Claude came home. He knew nothing of Bernard's death, but as he entered the close he was struck with the strange stillness round the organist's house.

No one was in the sitting-room but Jem, who stood by the window holding an old chant-book in his hand. As he slowly turned over the well-worn pages, Claude heard

a heavy sigh. The door of the inner room was open. Claude pushed it back, and saw in the grey twilight Ruth's kneeling figure, and the little coffin on the bed. The story was told. Another mourner had come ; but from that hour Ruth was comforted.

Beneath the shadow of the cathedral he so loved, and where faint strains of music float above his grave, the little chorister lies sleeping.

The simple white cross that marks the place bears only the record of his name and age, and underneath the words, "And Jesus called a little child unto Him." But he lies near where the choristers pass on their way to and from the cathedral ; and many an early spring blossom or lingering autumn flower are scattered on his grave, by those who loved him in his life, and sung around his death-bed when he died.

It was here that, some years later, Ruth and Claude parted from "Old Jem" for ever in this world. His training for a missionary life was completed, and he was ready to take upon him with all his heart and strength the work that Bernard had left for him to do.

With sorrowful, heartfelt earnestness they bade him "God speed," on a quiet summer evening. The next day he sailed for one of the far-off isles in the Pacific Ocean.

When the white cliffs of England grew dim in the distance, and hope seemed to fade away with them, as it has done to so many others,—and often afterwards, when in his lonely life of labour he was weary or disheartened,—he thought of Bernard's unclouded faith and

trust, and he took courage. He kept the memory of the early-called deeply treasured in his heart, and looking back on his past life, often thought with his old reverent love, "And a little child shall lead them."

The sun still shines with sparkling brightness through the lattice windows of the organist's house on summer mornings, and in winter evenings the red firelight dances on the wall. But strange footsteps cross and recross the old threshold stone, and young fresh voices laugh and sing, where Bernard drooped and died.

Outside, the ivy clings to the grey stones, and the roses that bloomed in his coffin climb along the wall ; but the swallows' nest is deserted in the roof, and Ruth and Claude are far away, and Bernard is in heaven.

"Is that all?" asked Effie, drawing a long breath.

"That is all."

"It is a very sad story, and not at all like what I expected."

"I call it a very dull story," observed the peacock, who had sauntered after Effie. He had been too much occupied in arranging his plumage, by-the-bye, to hear above one word in ten.

"You do, do you?"—Effie turned round upon him sharply. "You had better tell us a better one, then!"

"I? oh dear, no!"—and the peacock spread his glittering feathers out to their full extent, and twisted his head round to look at them. "I never pretended to tell stories—I have not turned my mind that way," he continued, absently.

"Then don't pretend to criticise."

"But there is a legend among us," he suggested presently, unwilling to miss the opportunity of attracting attention, "which I might perhaps call to mind—a tradition telling how the bright jewels were first set in our trains."

"Your everlasting trains!" exclaimed Effie. "I suppose they were always gaudy, and peacocks were always vain."

"The legend I spoke of says not. But it is difficult to imagine us without our beauty."

"It is easy to imagine you with a little less conceit!" said Effie, severely. "Well, who told you your legend?"

"My mother," answered the peacock, with a graceful bend of his blue neck.

"And how came she to know it?"

"The rain-drops whispered it to her one night as she sat on her nest," was the reply.

"We will see about hearing it to-morrow," said Effie: "it is too late for another story to-day. The birds are leaving off their songs, and the flowers are closing fast. I must go home. Good-bye, swallow. I am sorry Bernard died. Good-night, all my friends."

And sleepy chirping voices echoed her "good-night," as Effie went away.

"Be in the way, in case I wish to hear your story in the morning," she said, looking over her shoulder at the peacock as she crossed the terrace.

The lamp was burning on Uncle Walter's table when Effie passed the library, and his head was bent over a more ponderous folio than ever.

The lingering twilight sunk over Effie's midsummer day.

All the next morning the peacock waited near the fountain, or watched for Effie from the terrace-steps. Late in the afternoon she came, breathless and laughing, with a little basket of green rushes in her hand, full of water-lilies.

"I forgot all about your story, peacock," she began ; "we have been so busy on the banks of the lake. The swan had quarrelled with the ducks, and I have had to make peace between them. I am ready now."

She seated herself carelessly on the terrace wall, and tore in pieces the broad leaves of her water-lilies, as she prepared to listen.

The storyteller-elect took up a position where the full light fell upon his plumage. It was a wonder he did not have a sun-stroke ; only we are all aware that "pride knows no pain."

"You don't expect me to believe all you tell me ?" said Effie, raising her head at the last moment.

"Oh dear, no !" replied the peacock, nothing daunted.



The Peacock's Story.

— ♦ —

THE cowslip startles in meadows green,
The buttercup catches the sun in its chalice;
And there's never a leaf or a blade too mean
To be some happy creature's palace.



10



ONCE upon a time, in the days of the fairies, many years ago, there lived a little fairy, who had no friends in the world.

She was of a lovely race—a fairy of the flowers; but though she lived in a garden, where flowers bloomed everywhere around, and which was also a favourite haunt of her kindred, she had never been at the Court. Once only she had seen the Queen, borne aloft on the gorgeous wings of a gold and purple butterfly; but she knew nobody, so she was very desolate.

There were troubles even in fairy-land, and the fate of all was not cast in equal brightness. This little fairy knew nothing of the gay world. She had been very unhappy, and was very lonely still.

Her home was the unopened bud of a white lily. The bud now grew alone upon the parent stem, but it had not always done so.

Once there had been a tall blossom in full bloom, with

glistening leaves like snow, and petals of gold. One morning, the master of the garden chanced to pass by the spot where the flower was proudly growing. It glanced so in the sun, as the breeze caused it to bend its stately head forwards, that the master of the garden paused before it, and then he carried it off to present to his ladye-love. As ill-luck would have it, the fairy of the lily lay sleeping just then in her white and gold chamber among the leaves, so she was carried away. Her daughter was playing in her nursery inside the bud, and she never saw or heard of her mother again, but lived on quite alone.

She was not even sure of her own name; but she had a dim remembrance of a gay silver voice calling her "Whitestar," so she supposed she had been named after her own flower, and in her musings she always called herself "poor little Whitestar."

Every morning "poor little Whitestar" ate her breakfast alone, and drank some of the crystal dew that lay on the leaves of her bud. Then she peeped out of its entrance, and watched the bees as they flew busily about and gathered honey from the flowers. Once a bee had come to her home, but just as he alighted he caught sight of little Whitestar watching him with mingled fear and interest. He drew respectfully back, for the bees never disturb fairies; so he buzzed away to an inviting honeysuckle hard by. It is probable that he told his friends that the lily was a fairy home, for no bee ever came to visit little Whitestar again.



Well, when noontide came, and the air was warm and heavy, little Whitestar curled herself up and went to sleep, as she had always seen her mother do, and so got through that part of the day pretty well. But the golden afternoons were very long and tedious, and she watched the shadows lengthen, and the sun sink towards the west, in listless weariness.

The night, however, was her most restless time ; for then her fairy nature was all awake, and she longed to be up and dancing in the moonlight.

Watching at the entrance of her lonely home, she saw the Court gather, and the fairies go by to join the Queen.

Whitestar longed to speak to them sometimes, and tell them her history. Once she had nearly summoned up courage to accost the Fairy of the Tulip ; she fancied there was some likeness between a tulip and a lily. But the great lady flew past very quickly, and Whitestar heard her give orders to her firefly, who went before to light the way to the palace, in a very haughty tone. Poor little Whitestar, who was proud as well as shy, drew back disappointed ; and when the firefly's lamp and the gleam of the fairy's red and gold train had passed away, she sat down and cried.

But she could not help following her in thought to the gay scene whither she was bound. She pictured to herself the brilliant Court and the Queen upon her throne, with her subjects dancing around her, in such bright colours, that she grew to think her own white hall was dull and narrow. The ceiling was low, and the entrance

so small that the moonbeams could scarcely force their way in ; and when there, they danced and quivered about as if they knew they were imprisoned. Little Whitestar grew so discontented that she thought even her fairy food insipid.

One day, after she had spent a long time in mourning over her fate, she drew near the entrance, and stood looking out. She noticed with surprise that the leaves were certainly further apart, making the lily loftier than it used to be ; but what was that ? She was weary of the lily-bud.

There lay the garden brilliant with flowers. There were roses of every shade and hue ; there were dazzling geraniums in masses on the ground, and pure verbenas, looking whiter from contrast with their scarlet neighbours ; there were gaudy tulips, worthy of their haughty mistress, and azaleas holding their proud heads aloft ; starry jessamine and delicate creepers climbed with ivy along a trellised wall. In the middle a fountain threw its sparkling waters high into the air, while the woods waved temptingly beyond.

“Oh, how beautiful !” exclaimed little Whitestar, suddenly. “The woods are beckoning to me. I will leave this unfriendly garden, where I am treated as a stranger, and go into the merry greenwood.”

With a sudden spring the fairy left her lily, and stood upon the grass beneath. The air was heavy with the scent of flowers : scarcely a breath stirred that morning.

The fairies were all sleeping as Whitestar passed ; for it had been moonlight, and the Court had danced late last night. But she went on her way fearlessly, passing by flower-palaces where everything was silent, and looking up to them admiringly.

"Truly," she thought, "I was right to be discontented. No fairy is so ill-lodged as I am." And as she spoke she came to a moss-rose tree laden with drooping flowers.

"I will go up," said Whitestar, "and sleep in that soft bed of roses. It is a palace for a queen."

But, alas ! the palace was well guarded, and the wandering fairy was wounded by sharp thorns placed like sentinels round the property of the Queen.

Poor little Whitestar drew back disappointed. "At least," she said, "my lily had no thorns."

As she went on, she noticed a brightly-tinted geranium, whose flowers were near the ground.

"No danger of hidden enemies here," said the fairy, joyfully, and she sprang lightly up ; but as her weight rested on the full-blown flower, the leaves fell off on every side, and the bare stem remained alone.

Whitestar looked at it in sorrowful wonder. "Yes," she repeated, sadly, "I was right at first. The garden is no place for me ; I will go to the greenwood."

The gates were reached at last ; the pillars on each side were tapestried with climbers, the honeysuckle wafted a breath of fragrance to the wanderer, and one of the trailing wreaths of ground-ivy touched her as she passed as if imploring her to return.

Whitestar dashed it indignantly aside. "I am free!" she cried as she sprang forwards, and the garden was left behind.

She came to a large meadow, wonderfully green, on which the sunlight streamed with dazzling power. She breathlessly hurried forwards, looking onwards to the woods. They seemed still very far away, and there was a brook to be crossed before she could reach them. Wild flowers grew among the meadow grass.

"Perhaps," thought Whitestar, "some fairies may live here, and I can ask my way."

Almost as she spoke her eyes fell upon a tiny figure robed in white and pink, and with such a fresh, innocent face, that Whitestar involuntarily smiled as she asked her way to the woods.

"I am come from the garden," she said, "and I am tired."

"From the garden!" echoed the other, looking with respect at Whitestar's glittering dress. "Will you not come in and rest? This is my home."

"Will you tell me your name?" asked Whitestar, as she entered.

"They call me Marguerite," said the pleasant, homely voice—"Marguerite of the daisy. I am afraid this is not like your home. It is only a wild flower; but I am very happy here." And she smiled as Whitestar rested on the tiny yellow cushion to which Marguerite had led her.

"How small it is!" thought Whitestar. "I did not

know that fairies lived in such flowers as these." But she said aloud, "It is very pretty, Marguerite."

"I think so, of course," rejoined the little fairy. "But then it is my home."

Whitestar remembered the lily with momentary self-reproach. "Have you ever been in the woods?" she asked. "I am going there now."

"You, beautiful fairy!" echoed Marguerite, incredulously. "Oh! do not go. We never go to the woods; they tell such stories of them. We could not live there, away from the sunshine and the grass."

"I am going," repeated Whitestar, decidedly. "Can you tell me the way?"

"No," said Marguerite; "none of our people go there. I will ask my neighbour, the fairy of the buttercup."

The fairy of the buttercup came—a merry little thing, all glowing with sunshine. She knew nothing of the woods, but she showed Whitestar her home—a smaller one than Marguerite's, but just as cheerful.

"I think I will stay here," said the stately fairy of the lily. "I will stay with you and Marguerite, and live in a wild flower."

"Take care!" exclaimed her new friend, suddenly springing up. "Fly—fly!"

Whitestar felt herself pulled rapidly on one side, she scarcely knew how; something dark overshadowed them, but the next minute she saw the merry fairy of the buttercup standing in another flower and laughing at her.

"What was it?" gasped Whitestar.

"Did you not see?" returned the other, still laughing. "One of the cows feeding in the meadow has passed this way and trodden down my flower. Never mind, I can easily find another; but we must always be on our guard here."

"Then I won't live in a meadow," returned Whitestar, "or in any flower so close to the ground."

"Nobody asked you," chimed in a new voice. "We want no grand ladies here, with their gold and silver robes and lofty notions. Close to the ground, indeed!"

"Be quiet, Dandelion," said Marguerite. "Don't mind him," she added to Whitestar. "He is jealous: only look how yellow he is! He was turned out of your garden once, and he has never forgiven it. Stay, fairy!"

But Whitestar shook her head and would not stay. "I will go on to the wood," she said with a sigh.

Marguerite was sorry, and bid her a kind farewell; and the gay little fairy of the buttercup also wished her good speed. "We would have tried to make you so happy," she said. "Your bed should have been in a poppy, where no one ever fails to sleep; and the harebells' would have rung to waken you in the morning."

Only Dandelion looked on angrily, and muttered something about the garden. Whitestar passed him haughtily, and would not stay to hear.

"Eglantine will help you across the stream, if you must go," said Marguerite. "She loves to send her branches across the water. Go to the fairy of the wild rose.

Sweetbriar, her brother, will come for you. He looks sharp, but indeed he is very pleasant when you know him well."

Eglantine sent her brother across the little stream, and Whitestar landed on the other side, and paused again to rest with the beautiful wild fairy of the rose.

"The wood is delightful!" said Eglantine. "Go on; do not be afraid." And the child of the woodlands waved a cheering farewell to the departing fairy.

It was early morning when Whitestar left the garden; late in the afternoon, when the sun had gone in, and the clouds were gathering and the wind rising, she reached the woods at last.

The ground was hard and bare, for the grass would not grow under the trees, and her delicate feet stumbled over the fallen twigs, or slipped upon the pointed leaves of the firs above her head. Even the moss upon the trunks of the trees was hard in comparison with her couch of lily leaves; and Whitestar's heart sunk within her.

Gradually the wind rose, until it swept whistling through the wood, and the clouds darkened overhead; then a few heavy drops fell upon the leaves, and the distant roll of thunder was heard.

The storm came on rapidly. Lightning flashed through the trees. Peal after peal of thunder echoed along the sky. Rain fell in torrents upon the thirsty earth.

Oh, Whitestar! where is the sheltering lily now?

The song of the birds was silenced; they had all crept

safely into their nests. Whitestar crouched beneath a tree, and bowed down her head despairingly.

"Fairy!" exclaimed a voice near her; and Whitestar looked up in terror at the harsh, hoarse tones. "Fairy, what ails you?"

The speaker was a peacock. He stood with his feathers gathered closely round him, and one leg raised, as if he had been about inadvertently to place it on the tiny white form nestling at his feet.

"I am lost!" sighed poor little Whitestar.

"Who are you?" asked the peacock.

"Poor little Whitestar, the fairy of the lily." And as she spoke the last words, Whitestar raised herself despondingly, but with the dignity of a high-born fairy, from the wet ground.

"The fairies and my race are friends," said the peacock, after a pause. "Fairy Whitestar, you must hope."

"I have no hope," said Whitestar, mournfully. "I shall never see the garden nor my white home again."

"Why not?"

"I am lost," again repeated Whitestar. "My lily is far away, the evening is drawing on, and the storm raging."

"But the storm will soon be over," said the peacock.

"No," answered Whitestar, sinking back into her former attitude. "It seems to me that the sun will never shine any more, and my happiness is over."

"I don't see that," observed the peacock; but Whitestar made no answer.

There was a long silence.

"Whitestar, look up," said the peacock at last.

The fairy raised her head, and behold ! the storm was passing away. The rain had ceased, and through a vista of trees she could see the sun just ready to sink into a sea of gold and crimson clouds ; the wind had sunk, and as it went whispering through the trees, she fancied it murmured the word "hope."

A few minutes more, and there was a rainbow, whose brilliant arch spanned an expanse of blue, calm sky. Again the peacock bade her look up, and see the emblem of hope.

Still the garden was far away, and the earth was cold and wet, and the wood lonely.

Then the peacock bade Whitestar mount upon his back. Safely nestled among his feathers, she told him the story of her loneliness, her discontent, and her repentance.

"You should have had more faith," was the peacock's only comment.

"Ah, yes ; but tell me, have you ever had a great wish, as I had, and been discontented?"

"Yes," said the peacock, humbly—for peacocks were humble in those long-ago days, and there were no bright colours in their plumage. Perhaps it would have been better for their characters had the gift of beauty never been bestowed : but let that pass.

"Tell me about your wish," said Whitestar.

"I should like to be very beautiful," answered the peacock, with a sigh. "I see many birds with gorgeous

plumage, and the world smiles on them ; and I—well, I have a large spreading train, but it is all dark and sombre. I wish my feathers were more brilliant, and that everyone could admire me.”

Whitestar sighed, and both were silent, until the peacock offered to carry the fairy back to the garden upon his back.

She was only too glad now to think she should reach the lily-bud again. The bird carried her safely, until, in the gathering summer gloaming, he paused in one of the green walks of the garden.

“I may not carry you further,” he said. “Yonder grows your lily. You can find it easily. Farewell!”

“Peacock,” said the fairy, as she alighted, and stood once more on the smooth turf, and her voice trembled with gratitude, “if I were a powerful fairy, I would try to prove my thankfulness to you ; but I am only poor little Whitestar. You have taught me, however, to-day, that one should always hope, and I will hope that some day I may show you that I am not ungrateful. If the time ever comes when I can serve you, remember the fairy of the lily.”

“I need no thanks,” answered the peacock ; “but we will both hope for bright days to come. Once more, farewell !” And Whitestar was left alone.

Quickly and lightly her feet tripped over the turf on her homeward way, but again her steps were arrested.

“Whitestar !” said a low voice, clear and sweet as music ; and a strange, soft light beamed upon the path.



Then the fairy knew that she was in the presence of the Queen, and that the light came from the star upon her brow, shaped like the blossom of the jessamine. Whitestar sank on the ground before her.

"Whitestar!" repeated the same musical tones. "Faithless child! you have thought yourself forgotten. Is it not so?"

"Yes," murmured the fairy, bending her head still lower.

"Do not kneel to me," said the Fairy Queen, gently. "Rise up, and listen. Learn, my child, that you are come of high degree. You are my only sister's daughter. You have wearied of your long time of loneliness and probation, and you never guessed that loving eyes were watching over your childhood; but, oh Whitestar!"—and the Queen's sweet voice grew more earnest—"those who are born to rule must know first how to obey, and the lesson of patience and hope must be learnt by all. I trust that the troubles of to-day have taught you much; only, my child, when you are very happy in your home of flowers, remember to look back sometimes to the clouds and darkness of the wood. You will never see me again, Whitestar. I am summoned to be queen over a land that is far away from here. Yonder wait my guards, already mounted on their dragon-flies, and I must not delay. Go home now. Farewell, and remember!"

For a moment a light hand rested on Whitestar's head; when she looked up again, the gleam had faded away, and the Queen was gone.

Awe-struck and bewildered, the fairy hastened home ; but as she reached the well-known spot, she paused in speechless amazement. Instead of the half-closed bud, a full-blown stately lily raised itself loftily in the air, while within, the gold petals had formed themselves into a fit throne for a queen. Faithless Whitestar ! the rain had burst open the flower.

Nor was this all. Around her golden throne stood grouped the fairy Court. More brilliant than Whitestar had ever fancied them in her dreams, they stood before her now. The fairy of the rose was there, her pink robes spangled with the dew of the night, holding the royal mantle, made of the moss of roses. Another bore the crown-like blossom of yellow calceolaria ; and the fairy of the tulip, whom Whitestar had once so feared, held the royal sceptre brought from the heart of her flower. Chamberlains were everywhere glittering in myrtle green ; pages clad in violet scattered perfume on the air. And thus, awaiting her approach, they stood. For Whitestar was the Queen.

As she drew near, the bells of the campanulas and fuschias rang out a peal of greeting, and a wild strain of fairy music was breathed upon the air, welcoming Queen Whitestar to her lily throne.

The silver moonlight of a midsummer night beamed upon the fairy ring. Gaily and lightly the Court danced around their young Queen beside the bright waters of the fountain.

When Whitestar was arrayed in ner royal mantle, she

was led by two of her officers of state to look at herself in the illuminated water of the basin. All around fire-flies lighted her with their tiny lamps, and a circle of glow-worms stationed upon the grass marked the limits of the fairy ring.

The royal fleet of water-lilies lay at anchor in the fountain. Once, weary of dancing, the Queen embarked upon her own yacht, and reclining beneath its snowy sails, lay listening to the music, and weaving visions of a glorious reign.

Marguerite should come to the Court, she planned, and be one of her maids of honour. How dazzled she would be with all the splendour around ! And the merry little fairy of the buttercup should come too, and listen to grander chimes than those of the harebells. Eglantine also, with her delicate wild loveliness, would be one of the beauties of the Court ; and when Pandelion heard that they were summoned away, how sorry he would be that he, too, had not been kind to the fairy princess in her trouble.

It would be superfluous to say here that the Queen carried her designs into effect. The fairy of the daisy came at her friend's call. They added more pink and white flounces to her simple robes, and called her a double daisy. But they never thoroughly succeeded in making a fine lady of her. To this day, she loves cottage gardens best, and escapes from courtly parterres to bloom on village greens.

As for the fairy of the buttercup, she laughed at the

idea of leaving the meadow, and she lives on there still, leading a sunny life, content and joyous. Dandelion, in spite of all Whitestar's displeasure, managed to creep into the garden, and it was very difficult to get rid of him. Once it was whispered that he even set up a dwelling within the magic circle of the fairy ring; but none of the courtiers like to speak of it, and he did not stay there long.

Eglantine became a beautiful great lady; but when she found that they would not let her throw her tangled branches where she would, and that they called her wild gracefulness uncourtly, she grew sad. So Whitestar bade her go back to the woods, and the fairy of the wild rose obeyed, and grew happy again, and was more beautiful than ever. But these incidents in the new Queen's reign still lay in the unknown future.

Meantime, Whitestar was waiting for the announcement of the banquet. She landed from her yacht, and as a lily of the valley brimming over with nectar was presented to her, she bowed graciously to her subjects, and drank to them all in a loving cup.

The red light of morning was beginning to tinge the eastern sky before the fairy revels broke up. As Whitestar, mounted on the white butterfly which was alone thought worthy of the lily queen, led her court homewards at last, she saw her friend the peacock standing alone in one of the broad walks. His train was spread around him, as in duty bound in the presence of royalty.

Whitestar checked her steed.



"Peacock," she said, as with a radiant smile she bent towards him; "my friend in adversity, the hour you taught me to hope for has come. I can serve you now. Only name your wish."

"You know it already, fair Queen," stammered the poor peacock, dazzled and overwhelmed. "You know my wish for a few bright colours among my dusky plumes."

"I thought so," said Whitestar, smiling, as she dipped her hand into the dew-filled chalice of a flower near at hand, and sprinkled the silver drops over the peacock's train. The rays of the rising sun fell upon them, and caused them to sparkle with the same brilliant tints as the rainbow which he had shown her yesterday in the wood.

"They could not be more beautiful," said the grateful Queen. "They shall remain so always; and when anyone looks at you they shall be reminded of Hope, as I was, when you showed me the rainbow shining through the clouds."

Whitestar and her fairy Court passed away as a dream, and once more the peacock was alone; but his heart swelled with pride and joy, and as he swept along, his jewelled train glancing in the sun, his step assumed a very different tread from the humble one of yesterday.

Time passed on, and the peacock never saw the Fairy Queen again.

Fairies have long disappeared from the earth, yet his descendants still keep that summer morning's gift. One

fairy lingers yet. Her name is Hope, and she has the happy gift of dressing everything she touches with her rainbow tints.

Almost as the peacock ended, he uttered a loud, hoarse scream.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed Effie, starting up. "What can have happened?"

"It is going to rain," answered the bird. "Look at those heavy clouds on the horizon. Don't you feel how sultry and breathless the air has become? We shall have a storm. I have been longing to give my warning cry for the last half-hour, but I did not like to break the thread of my story."

"I thought you became rather hurried towards the end," said Effie. "I suppose you thought the lonely little fairy was like me."

"If the cap fits, wear it," returned the complacent peacock. "Ah, wasn't I right?"—as a few heavy rain-drops fell upon the terrace steps, and the faint growl of thunder broke the silence.

The peacock screamed again, and Effie anxiously scanned the sky.

"We are going to have a great storm," she said. Effie was right. It rained heavily for several days; but it was worth any number of storms to see how resplendently the sun afterwards came out. The scorched grass was as green again as in the early spring, and every parched leaf looked, Effie said, just as good as new.

She was sitting on a fallen tree one morning by the side of the stream, watching the bright waters flash past, swollen by the rain. She heard a great rustling among the leaves above her, and suddenly her first friend, the sparrow, whirled down to her feet, his bright little eyes brighter still with anger.

"You have entirely forgotten your engagement to me, I perceive," he began. "I hear of you listening to no end of stories, though I believe I had the honour of first proposing to you the plan."

"I thought a bird in hand was worth two in the bush," replied Effie. "Why did you go off to the cherries?"

"Because they were ripe," rejoined the sparrow, recovering his good-humour, and assuming a certain languid indifference of manner. "I was asked for my opinion. One has to do many things against one's will. There are duties owing to society, even in this retired spot."

"I should like to hear your story very much now, little cock-sparrow."

"Cockney sparrow, if you please," said the wee bird, with a pert attempt at a joke. "I am a Londoner. But"—and he heaved a sigh—"I have been rustivating so long that I have nothing new to tell you."

"New or old, I will have your story, if you please. It will not be about fairies, I suppose, like the last I heard?"

"Fairies, indeed!" ejaculated the sparrow, indignantly. "Who ever heard of such things in London?"

"Tell us what you do hear of there," said Effie, less graciously.

The sparrow chirped, to clear his throat, jerked his head upwards in somewhat ostentatious thought, caught at and swallowed a passing fly, and then began.

The swallows' grey cathedral town, with little Bernard's grave, the glittering fairy ring, and Whitestar's lily throne, seemed alike to fade away into a dim background of distance and romance, before the practical tone adopted by a London sparrow of the nineteenth century.



The Sparrow's Story.



“Ad ogni uccello suo nido e bello.”

ITALIAN PROVERB.



“**A**NY news yet?” asked a respectable middle-aged sparrow, as he landed on the grass near a bird who had been gravely digging in the ground with his beak.

The sparrow addressed raised his head and shook it.

“No,” he said, “none. It is very wearing, and my wife is quite tired out.”

“Ah! I dare say; but patience, my dear fellow, patience! I am a family sparrow,”—indeed, he looked it—“and I have been through these things myself.”

“I am quite aware of that,” returned the other. “Is there any news in the world, as I can give you none from home? Is anything stirring this fine evening?”

“Not much. A child has been feeding the ducks down by the boat-house, and has left a good many crumbs behind him, and there are more midges on the water than I have seen this season.”

“Ah! thank you for the hint. Good evening.” The

sparrow who had been digging in the ground rose rather hastily and departed, and the last comer watched him fly off towards the river, and then set to work to finish the hole already nearly completed, with a twitter that partook somewhat of the nature of a sneer.

The above conversation took place on a bright spring evening on the shores of the Serpentine. The peculiar look of knowing the world well—more easily seen than described—and the black hue spread over their feathers, proclaimed the speakers to be London sparrows; and one sparrow was my father.

A little later that same evening, the event so impatiently looked forward to took place; an egg broke in a little nest perched on a strong branch of one of the old trees that overshadow the Serpentine, and I scrambled out of it, dazzled and bewildered, and was launched then and there into the London world.

The park was very full,—the drive along the river thronged with carriages and riders. The setting sun flashed upon many a bright harness and shining carriage, and sparkled merrily upon the smooth river. Children were playing, and people sauntering up and down by the water's edge, and the tender green of spring lay upon the old trees, untouched as yet by the smoke of the great city.

It was a gay scene upon which I opened my eyes and stared around me, only half attending to the rapturous welcome with which my father and mother greeted their first-born son.



I caused a prodigious fuss. Father was ready with such a delicious midge to be popped down my ever-ready throat, and followed it up with that unnatural compound which men call bread. And yet if only I were half as ugly as the little downy, yellow things, with gaping throats and legs out of all proportion, who shortly joined the group, I wonder how even paternal love could get up any satisfaction at all.

Such as we were, my mother thought her little family unrivalled.

My brothers were named Bobby and Dart ; my little sister was called Flossy, and I rejoiced in the short name of "Joe," chosen for me because it was that of a certain disreputable and shabby dog, who, I have since had reason to think, was a cur, but who chose to stand and wag his tail under our tree, at the very moment that my mother's eldest son appeared upon the scene.

"A good omen," said my fond, simple mother. So Joe was my sponsor, and he has never given me anything in his life.

The days passed swiftly by. Every morning when the sun rose and peered through the slight veil of mist that always hangs over the town, we awoke gladly to another bright spring day. Then came the interval before breakfast (London hours are always rather late), when our mother had flown off to market for us, and we waited, eager and hungry, till the sun rising higher and higher, sent a little sunbeam to peep through the leaves and shine into our nest. How merrily we always greeted it, as it half blinded

our young eyes ! How little Bobby used to twitter and try to sing, even then !—he was very musical in after life. Poor Bobby ! his love of music was the ruin of him.

There was not a better-appointed nest in London than ours was, or better breakfasts than my mother gave. She knew where all the best things were to be had ; she was always there when the park-keeper scattered grain for the ducks, and used boldly to steal bits of bread from under the very beaks of the haughty swans. Then came long mornings, half chatty, half drowsy, while children ran and shouted underneath the trees, and boys paddled in the water, and were scolded by their nurses. But in the afternoon none of us felt inclined to sleep : they are the happy hours of the London sparrow.

Then came the sounds that were associated with the earliest moments of my existence—the roll of the carriages, the tramp of the horses, the hum of the gay crowd. Boats went skimming over the water, leaving bright lines of sunshine in their wake. As the shadows grew longer, the carriages gathered more and more thickly in the ring, until the horses could only pace slowly along, one after another ; and the bright eyes of Dart, Bobby, and of sister Flossy, and my perhaps not less interested glances, scanned each of the fair ladies who passed lazily beneath us. Ah ! who would not be a London sparrow in the bright days of the season ?

Many of my mother's friends dropped in, too ; sometimes the branch was quite covered with sparrows, who

told of other nurseries, and gossiped over the news of the world.

I have spoken only of my mother, and but little of my father ; in truth, I saw little of him in those days. He had been very kind in the first flush of his fatherly greetings ; now he left my mother a great deal alone, and he flew gaily about, was a constant attendant on all the housetops where sparrows most do congregate, and a great lover of good things.

My poor, patient mother ! Many an hour she sat on her nest, or hovered about near at hand, lonely but for us little ones ; while my father, perched on the bars of the park-railing, scanned the passers-by, and conversed with the other sparrows of pleasure who were his chosen companions. Many an evening the sun had almost set before he returned home ; then he was often sulky, and putting his head under his wing, went obstinately to roost at once.

But sometimes, when we were safely tucked in between the straw and feathers, and supposed to be sleeping under a great bit of wool, the pride and ornament of the nest, our mother was at leisure to listen, and he told her stories of the gay world that banished sleep from my eyes, and made me long for the time when I should be my own master.

One afternoon, I remember, my father had been busily pluming himself preparatory to going out. He sat on a twig, smoothing the last ruffled feather with anxious care. He looked very handsome, with his bright eyes and

glossy plumage, its original colour slightly darkened by London smoke, a tint which is rather encouraged by sparrow dandies, as distinguishing them from casual visitors from the country.

I had been watching to see him fly off with the graceful easy motion peculiar to him ; but he lingered still, and my mother's voice smote my ear. " Oh, stay at home, Peter ! " said the pleading, wistful note. " Why will you always leave me alone ? "

" You have the chicks," answered my father.

" Ah, Peter ! "

" Well, wife, what would you have ? You have no thought beyond your nest now." My father was growing impatient.

" My duties as a mother —— " she said, faintly.

" Quite so, Jenny—quite so ; but I am not a mother, you see. You cannot expect me to stay perched on one branch all day, watching till Dart opens his mouth (a very large one, by the way) to be fed, or to prevent Joe from tumbling out of the nest ! "

" It is very lonely sometimes ; " and my poor mother's voice faltered.

" But, wife, what can I do ? It is all very well for you, with your home interests ; but a cock-sparrow must fly with the world, or he will be forgotten. I have public duties, Jenny, and many friends."

" Ah, Peter, I know it. But have you quite forgotten the old nest on the bridge, where I was bred ? Do you never think of the early cool spring days, when we used

to sit on the stone ledge together, and look down into the water to see the reflection of the floating clouds ! Do you not remember seeing the swallows and martins come back from beyond seas in flocks, and saying you cared little who came and who went, provided we were together ? Do you not remember our longing for a nest of our own ? Oh, for those happy days over again, when we were poor and young ! Oh, for those light-hearted hours of toil, when we worked so hard to build our nest ! Peter, can you not remember how lightly we skimmed across the river, far away into the shades of Kensington Gardens ?—and how you followed a flock of sheep, and came back in triumph with the big bit of wool, telling me I should have the prettiest and cosiest nest in London ?”

“And so you have,” said my father.

“I know it ; I am not ungrateful. I have been a good wife to you, Peter, indeed I have. But we were far happier before we lived here, in the dear old times when we chose the twig every night where we should roost, and worked hard all day together.”

“We were young and foolish,” said my father. “It was all very well, wife, but we have risen in the world since then. We have feathered our nest—the working days are over now. Why shouldn't we enjoy ourselves ?”

“If you still love me,” said my mother, humbly.

“Of course I do, Jenny—there !” And the careless caress he gave her was almost a peck, for the deep tones of many clocks were striking, and the shadows were

growing long. "If you knew how late I shall be!—the midges will be all gone, and it was such a day for them! Oh! and you have ruffled my left wing—not a feather in its place! Quick, Jenny!—help me!"

My mother's active little beak soon repaired the damage. My father thanked her, spread his wings, one moment he hung poised over the water, and looked at his image in its glassy surface, and then he flew away. My poor mother! she watched him until his rapid wings had carried him quite out of sight, and then she turned back to her little ones, and stroked Dart's downy head softly. He uttered a sleepy, loving chirp, and so she nestled her head down upon his, and rested there.

It befell in those days that Bobby and I had a quarrel. It was nothing unusual, for our fights were of daily occurrence, and if our mother had been at home, it would have ended in nothing. But a rumour was afloat that a sparrow had been barbarously destroyed by a duck that morning, and my mother, always uneasy on her truant mate's account, had hurried off to ascertain the truth of the report.

My father was safe enough, I believe; but left to ourselves, the fight between Bobby and me grew furious, and in a desperate struggle we both fell, with wings interlaced, and beaks firmly fixed in each other's feathers, over the side of the nest, and tumbled through the branches on to the ground.

The shock sobered us at once. Bobby gave a long whistle, and I staggered to my feet and stared around me.

We had never left the nest before. Our mother had

been talking of teaching us to fly, but she lingered reluctantly over the last days of our dependence on her, and put it off as long as possible. Bobby and I, our quarrel entirely forgotten in our first adventure, held a council of war, in which we agreed that it was just as well that we had fallen—it was time we should be seeing something of life, and not be sheltered for ever under our mother's wing. Dart and Flossy might continue home birds, and learn to fly in the old hum-drum way—we were nestlings no longer!

“We will go and hear the band play,” said Bobby.

“We will go and hunt for worms in Kensington Gardens,” said I. Whereupon we nearly quarrelled again.

But at last we started amicably. In a short time my wings began to ache, and my body grew very heavy. I heard a terrified twitter, and beheld Bobby on the ground beneath me.

I was thankful to stop.

“What is it, Bobby?” I asked, condescendingly.

“I can't get on,” replied the recumbent Bobby.

“Rest a little, then;” and I perched beside him and rested myself.

“Try again, won't you?” I resumed presently, and Bobby tried accordingly. We flew tumbling on, very near the ground, and very breathless.

“Bobby!” I gasped at last.

“Yes, Joe,” he answered, faintly.

“Wouldn't it be pleasant to stop and look about us?”

“Very pleasant, Joe.”

We stopped accordingly. I was giddy and stiff, and I could almost hear the beating of Bobby's little heart.

But my pride would not give way, and I felt I was the master-spirit.

"This is very jolly!" I said; "isn't it?"

"Oh, very!"

For a little while longer we kept up a dreary pretence at enjoyment, and then Bobby fell again, and I sank, almost as exhausted as himself, on the ground beside him.

"I—I am afraid we are too young," I faltered, after a time.

Bobby made no answer.

It had been a bright day enough, but there was a keen wind, and it blew searchingly among our half-grown feathers, and struck chill upon my heart.

"Joe," said poor Bobby at length, opening his half-closed eyes, and looking dimly at me, "where shall we sleep to-night?"

"Would you like to go home?" I asked, feeling that my reputation as a young sparrow of spirit was gone for ever.

"I can't—I can't fly any more!" said Bobby. "Oh, mother!"

It was getting serious.

"Bobby, are you unwell?" I inquired.

"I think—I think I am dying!" and Bobby fluttered his weary little wings, and closed his eyes.

I flew stiffly to the water's edge, and picked up a drop of water in my beak. The sun was opposite me, looking

like a crimson ball as it sank down behind the distant houses. It would grow dark soon. How was I ever to get Bobby home?

The water revived him, and he hopped a few paces onward, while I accompanied him encouragingly.

Bobby did not die; but it was very late when we arrived, crest-fallen and utterly exhausted, at the foot of our tree.

The faintest call brought our mother from the nest above. Her feathers were all ruffled, and her eyes dim with anxiety and watching. I do not remember her broken words of joy and welcome and reproach; I only know how comfortable it was to feel again the soft touch of the wings whose shelter we had thought it so grand to despise.

"Wait there, Joe," she said, as she lifted the helpless Bobby upon her back and flew away with him. But what struck me most was, that my father was at home. I saw his bright eyes looking down at me. The next moment he came and joined me.

"What have you been doing, sir?" he began, sternly.

"We—we flew away, father."

"Where were you going?"

"To Kensington Gardens, to hunt for worms," I repeated, meekly.

"Then what possessed you to come back in such a hurry?" he said, as if the account of our destination had touched his sympathies.

"We were so tired."

My father laughed, and bending down, jerked me on

to his shoulder, and it was lifted by his strong wing that I reached the nest, where he tumbled me in among my sleeping brothers and sister, and left me.

There was a slight change in our way of life after this.

My mother did not say much to us the next morning.

"Joe, my eldest son, I trusted you!" very sorrowfully spoken, was her only reproach to me.

"But, mother, I took such care of Bobby," I replied, bringing that forward as the best feature in the case.

"Ah, Joe! learn to fly alone yourself first, my son!" she rejoined.

Nevertheless, she gave us more liberty, and taught us the use of our wings, so that few of those midsummer days were passed in the nest, and the little early sunbeam peeping in to visit us, often found the birds flown.

One day Bobby and I told our adventures to a young martin, who was rather a friend of ours. He listened with his head on one side, and a look of some amusement.

"When were you hatched?" he inquired, as Bobby ended his rather pompous recital.

We told him.

"Dear me! is it possible?" said he. "Why, I am younger than you are!"

"Have you flown further?" asked Bobby, disappointed in the effect he expected to produce.

"I"—with a chirp—"I have been in the country."

"What is the country?" asked Dart.

"Hampstead Heath," replied the martin, dogmatically.

I felt that my brothers were exposing their youth and inexperience.

"I dare say Hampstead Heath is a very nice place, but I never heard of it." I hoped thus to crush the martin at once.

"Whew!" whistled he. "So much the worse for you. But, you see, it is different for me. I am training."

"What for?"

"The great journey," said the martin, more gravely. "We are getting our wings in order already."

There was a pause.

"Where do you winter?" he resumed, presently.

"Why, here, I suppose."

"What! you remain in town after the season?" exclaimed the martin.

"I think so," said Bobby. "Why shouldn't we?"

"Oh, of course, if you like it; but have you ever thought of the cold? they tell me it is awful. And then, how little of the world you must see! I wouldn't be a sparrow!"

Bobby was getting the worst of it.

"If you were a sparrow," said I, loftily, "you would be made of sterner stuff than to fly before the first breath of cold air."

"Everyone to his taste;" and the martin cocked his tail impertinently. "We are children of the sun, and birds of passage. We cannot live without warmth and adventure."

"And we will not leave our homes and our country defenceless," retorted I.

"Besides, there are colder countries than England," put in Dart.

"I don't believe it."

"Ask the Canada goose."

"Not I," chirruped the martin. "I am not so forward as to go and ask questions of that giant bird. Besides, it's no use putting unattainable wishes into its head. Only fancy that great hulking animal on a forced flight under a southern sun! By the grave of my grandfather (which is in Africa, by-the-bye), the idea is too much for me! Good-bye. I am going to Shepherd's Bush." And the martin flew off with a swift lightness that was decidedly provoking.

"Mother," asked Dart that evening, "what is the country?"

"The country, my children!" My mother perched on the edge of the nest, and spoke very gravely. "The country is a strange and dangerous place, where we should be thankful that our lot has not been cast. Bread is almost unattainable there, and, worst of all, there are strong and cruel beasts, called hawks. I will not call them birds," said my mother, severely, "but rather ogres. They live only to spread desolation around them, and to destroy their weaker but worthier neighbours. And oh! children,"—here my mother leant over us, and was visibly affected,—"imagine the feelings of a poor mother, who, going forth unsuspectingly to provide food for her little ones, sees the mate of her heart fall a victim to one of these monsters, or expires herself in his clutches, leaving

a family of destitute chicks to the mercy of a cold world."

"But there are no hawks here?" timidly inquired Flossy, her young blood frozen by this fearful tale.

"No, my Flossy," answered my mother, caressing her. "I have heard of them no further off than Kensington Gardens, but I believe they never venture into the park. Your dear father and I took that into consideration when we built our nest."

Here my mother fell into a train of tender reminiscences of those building days when she had been so happy. Bobby and I agreed in whispers that she was timid and prejudiced, and that the country was probably delightful. "And I don't believe the martin's mother would have been afraid of hawks," said Bobby, sinking his voice yet more.

His mind was unformed, and easily dazzled.

"Be quiet, Bobby," I said, pecking him. "I dare say she is an odious old bird, just like her son."

But his words rankled. We consorted a great deal with the wildest sparrows we could find, flew about, and always pretended to have the tastes and feelings of martins.

"The young ones are getting too much for me," said my mother sadly to my father.

"Well, wife, you didn't expect to keep them in the nest always?"

"No, Peter, no; but they are so very wild. They have got into a set of sparrows that I don't like at all."

"Birds of a feather flock together," said my father.

"I don't know anything about it ; but pray look out, my dear fellow, and don't get caught."

"Dear me, no !"

But my warnings had little effect ; they were forgotten the next time the enthralling music sounded in his ears. Nearer and nearer he flew to the bars. I was some way behind him, and, confident in his previous escape, he grew every moment bolder. Some barley was scattered by a seemingly gentle hand. We sparrows are so proverbially imprudent. Bobby had pecked one or two grains, and eaten them with evident relish, before he saw what I caught sight of with horror. I darted forward, an inarticulate cry of warning trembling on my beak ; but the cruel hand was too quick and sure. That night I went home to my mother alone. Bobby was a caged sparrow now.

I need not say how she mourned for him, nor how she implored my father to take steps for his liberation. I was sent for to give him an account of the affair, and found him breakfasting on a bluebottle fly.

"This is a bad business, Joe," said he, scarcely looking up. "Why didn't you take better care of your brother ?"

"It wasn't my fault," I rejoined. "I warned Bobby often enough." And in as few words as possible I told the story.

My father sighed gently when I mentioned the barley. "There are excuses to be made for him," he said. "London is full of temptations to the young and unwary. I only wonder they did not get you too, Joe."

"Me! oh, no fear. You don't catch old birds with chaff!"

"Old birds!" ejaculated my father, helping himself to the bluebottle's sixth leg. "Old birds, indeed!"

Everything seemed altered when the brother was gone, who, with all his little foibles, had always been my favourite. I told them at home that I needed change, and I left the old roof-tree, and lived in quarters of my own.

When the martin, poor Bobby's old antagonist, came to bid me good-bye, I almost envied him the great journey that he spoke of with such earnest anticipation. Its near approach had changed him a good deal; he talked less, but twittered dreamily to himself. He was very sorry for Bobby, and spoke of imprisonment with a shudder even stronger than my own.

But his thoughts seemed already far off, and he wished me good-bye, and sailed away in the sunset with placid deliberation. I believe they started the next day.

The sober autumn days set in. London was very empty; but as most of my friends remained in town, we were by no means dull. My spirits rose again rapidly; for I confess I could see nothing particularly melancholy in the fall of the leaf. Berries were plentiful, and it seemed desirable that the smoke-dried and fading leaves should be removed.

I had a stolen interview at this time with my captive brother, which rather eased my mind about him. The cat had not attempted to eat him, nor had the hawk ever appeared to notice his presence. The bullfinch was very

kind about singing whenever Bobby asked him, and he had found a congenial spirit in a sparrow of his own standing, who shared his education.

In short, he seemed, in a dull, spiritless way, to have become reconciled to his destiny.

"Don't come too near the bars, Joe," he said, as I approached as close as I dared in my eagerness to speak to him. "You would never stand this life."

"How do you bear it? What do you do all day?" I inquired.

"Oh, we learn our parts. I am perfect in mine now. Do stay and see me act, Joe," said Bobby, with a touch of his old vanity, which somehow rather consoled me.

I could not disappoint him, so I stayed and saw my brother, to my infinite amazement, drag a little cart, go through various mysterious evolutions, and finally fall dead at the report of a cannon. I dashed myself frantically against the rails, but the supposed corpse half opened one eye, and winked it at me in a reassuring manner. Truly there was more talent in Bobby than I had ever fathomed. I had scarcely recovered from my surprise when the music ceased, Bobby rose to his feet, and the representation was over.

I was certainly happier now about his immediate safety, and over a feast of hips and haws, I rather boasted of my accomplished relative.

Hitherto it seemed that the winter had been only playing with us. We had a strong cold wind, which finished stripping the trees, and did for the dry leaves altogether.

There was hoar frost on the ground several mornings, but the sun melted it in a few hours, and went on his way in triumph.

We were louder than ever in our contempt for the cowardly birds who had fled before the first breath of cold air. We were to learn another lesson soon. Winter changed its tactics.

I awoke one morning with a shiver, and, removing my head from under my wing, looked round in bewilderment. The Serpentine was gone—the trees were gone. I could see no houses and no road ; instead, a thick damp yellow wall seemed to have grown up all around us.

Very cautiously I left my perch, and groped my way into Hyde Park Corner, narrowly escaping injuring myself upon the railings.

I rose higher in the air, to be out of harm's way.

Presently a huge black object loomed dimly before me. I approached it slowly, and peering round, found that I had alighted on the outstretched hand of the Duke of Wellington's statue.

Beneath me I could see nothing except a sickly spot of light here and there, for all the lamps were lighted. Hoarse cries, with the sound of slow moving carriage wheels, rose from below.

"I beg your pardon, I nearly knocked you down," said a voice close to me ; and a portly old sparrow whom I knew slightly, and who had been hopping along the Duke of Wellington's arm, stopped short beside me. "A thick fog this morning," he continued.

"Oho!" thought I, for I had heard of fogs before, though this was the first I had ever seen.

"I live up here for the fine air," resumed my acquaintance. "It is such a superior atmosphere to the foggy one of London. We shall have the sun up here soon."

I did not think the air very clear, but I pretended to be well versed in fogs, and observed that it was curiously different.

The old sparrow was gratified, said he knew my father well, and that I was a chip of the old block. He gave me some breakfast, a good thing, as I did not know where to get any in the fog, and the old sparrow knew almost as much about rare delicacies as my father. There were some preserved gnats of last summer, which I have never forgotten.

My friend's daughter shared our meal, a bright-eyed tiny sparrow, whom I thought lovely. She lighted up the lurid atmosphere, until I almost fancied the sunshine of which her father spoke was shining upon us. I was as saucy and agreeable as I could, and left reluctantly, promising to call again. But the bitter cold coming on rapidly, and the hard realities to which I was soon to awaken, effaced my promise from my mind.

The fog cleared off towards evening, but a bank of heavy clouds still hung upon the horizon. "It will snow before morning" were the last words I heard that night.

Dazzlingly bright looked the white world next day, all sparkling in the sun. The snow lay heavy upon the trees; there were chilling flakes even upon my wings, and my

claws were buried in snow. Soft, quick, and silent it had fallen all through the darkness ; I looked to see it melt in the sunshine, but the short winter day closed in, and the snow remained. It fell again that evening ; the Serpentine froze over, and soon people began to talk of the great frost.

And so it went on. The sun seemed to give up the struggle, and we scarcely saw him now. The bitter days rose and set cheerlessly, to be succeeded by still more bitter nights. Food began to fail. The ground was frost-bound under its covering of snow, and I grew very thin.

Many an hour I passed hopelessly wandering up and down the dark streets in search of food ; many an hour I perched numb and weary on a twig, and awoke to find the icicles forming round my feet.

At last I went back to the old tree. The snow had drifted deeply round it, and the wind blew keenly from the frozen river.

I found my mother there alone, crouching among the leafless branches, which gave but a scanty shelter. She was so changed and shrunk that I scarcely knew her, but some of the old light returned to her eyes as she recognised my voice. She was quite alone, she said, and had been so for a long time. My father had gone away long ago, and Dart and Flossy went off together soon after the frost began in search of food, and had never returned.

"I have waited for them until I am weary," she said ; "and I thought I should die quite alone. I don't mind dying now you are come, Joe. You won't leave me again?"

Her voice was weak and hoarse, very different from the tender murmuring tones I used to think so sweet. I told her I would never leave her again, and tried to persuade her to come away from the tree near the river, where the wind blew so coldly. But she shook her head, and would not quit the spot where all her happy spring-time had been passed. "You were all hatched here, Joe," she said. "Yonder is the twig where your father used to sit and sing to me when I was on my nest. Besides," she added, "I could not fly far now."

I do not like to remember the days that followed. We were starving. I tried manfully to get food for both of us; but it was of no use, and hungry and weak, we grew daily less able to struggle with the biting cold.

"Do not stay, Joe," my mother said at last. "You are young, and life is all before you. You have done your best. Leave me, dear son, to die."

I tried to answer hopefully, but I could think of nothing comforting to say, except that I would never leave her.

One evening I was on the path beneath the tree, hopping dizzily about, in the vain hope of finding a morsel of food; we had had none all day. A little Savoyard boy, with his hurdy-gurdy slung over his shoulder, came slowly along the path. He, too, looked weak and cold, for his clothes were threadbare, and his worn-out boots only half kept his feet from the snow. But as he walked he was eating a hunch of bread. I looked at it, oh! so wistfully, with a sick longing in my heart. Perhaps he noticed the little sparrow hopping at his feet. Perhaps sorrow and

privation had softened instead of hardening his heart; for a smile came over his wan face, and lighted up his dark sad eyes, and he broke off a piece from his scanty bit of bread, and crumbled it on the snow.

Little Savoyard, poor little dark-eyed stranger, far from the sunny land that they say is so fair to look upon,—God bless thee, and guide thee back there some day, for that one act of gentleness and mercy! He had brought a gleam of brightness to us. We made the bread last as long as we could, each pretending not to be *very* hungry, that the other might have a larger share. But it came to an end at last, and the great frost went on.

Once again the sun went down among dusky crimson clouds, and the light of stars gleamed overhead. We thought there had been a thaw, but it had frozen again since nightfall. My poor mother shivered ceaselessly; her little numbed feet could scarcely grasp the bough, and every now and then came a quick gasp, as she cowered lower and lower, striving to nestle among twigs that had turned into icicles. "It will not be for long, Joe," was all she said—"not long now."

Towards morning she grew quiet. I awoke from a short, uneasy sleep. It was colder than ever, and London seemed to me to be unnaturally still. The day had scarcely broken, but trees and buildings were beginning to stand out dark and indistinct in the shadowy dawn. Presently a streak of yellow edged with silver crept along the eastern sky, and the grey dusk melted slowly into light. Then the sun appeared, and rose over the mist,



looking like a faint, far-away reflection of his summer self. The hours dragged on until nearly noon before my mother moved or spoke.

"Joe," she said, faintly.

"Yes, mother."

"Where are you? Is it still dark? I can't see."

"The sun is shining, mother," I replied; "it will warm you soon."

"No, Joe,—no, my dear one. You have been very faithful, Joe, and patient to the last. Oh, how cold it is!" She shuddered, and spoke in broken gasps. "Joe, you will say good-bye to—poor Bobby and the others. I shall never see them again. Tell them—their poor old mother—loved them——" The sentence remained unfinished, the stiffened wings fluttered for a moment, and then were still.

Never again!—oh, mother, never again!

I can see that scene still. The wintry sun in the pale sky, and the ice flashing back its light—the hundreds of skaters on the river—merry voices ringing on the clear, sharp air—and underneath the tree a little sparrow lying on the hard ground, cold and dead!

I left my mother in her grave of snow, and came away from the old home where I had suffered so much. I flew slowly, for I was very weak, back into the streets.

My first care was to find Bobby. I knew where to look for him, and came upon his prison soon. He saw me as I approached and whistled to him, and he hopped towards me over the cat's back, with a studied jauntiness that distressed me.

"I have been thinking of you, Joe," he began. "It must have been very cold out in the park lately."

"It is cold," I replied ; and then I told him of our mother's death, and of her farewell message to her children.

I know he felt it, poor Bobby!—he always had an affectionate heart ; but as I ended, the harsh voice summoned him away. He hurried off to his uncongenial performance with an aching heart, and soon I heard the rattle of the little cart he drew, the laugh of the few bystanders, and the report of the cannon, at which he fell rigid as before.

I went away very sadly. "Better starvation," I thought, "and cold, and even death, than slavery!" And again the shelter and food I had almost envied Bobby for a moment, seemed dearly purchased at the expense of freedom.

The snow had lost all its whiteness in the streets. It was trodden down and blackened, and I thought it an emblem of my darkened life. Yet, as I curled my head under my wing—hungry and lonely, it is true, but somewhat sheltered from the wind by the houses—a voice seemed to whisper to me, "Courage, Joe! it is always darkest just before the dawn."

I was too tired and weak to move next morning. A strange drowsiness overpowered me, until at last I was awakened by the gentle opening of a window near which I had roosted. A pair of little plump white hands stole out, and suddenly a breakfast for a hundred sparrows lay spread on the window-sill beneath me.

I don't think I shall ever forget that morning. I believe I ate imprudently for a sparrow in my reduced state, but it did not harm me. I had no fears for the morrow, and I was right. The dear little white hand proved itself a guardian angel to me all the time of the great frost. But, in my gratitude and love for it, I did not forget the sad dark eyes and thin generous hand of my little Savoyard, the one friend of my darkest need.

I have nothing more to tell you of the winter. I do not think that the cold ever again affected me much, or that the March winds materially depressed my spirits.

I remember watching the thaw after the great frost with calm satisfaction, and triumphing as my mighty enemy the snow vanished away, and was transformed into mere water. The quick drip of the melting icicles, as they fell in big drops from the trees, was music to my ears ; and the first time I dug again in the softened earth was an hour of unmixed ecstasy.

The winter was very long ; but we lived through fogs and frost, through pouring rain and cutting winds ; and at last the air came burdened with a message from the south, and the first faint smile of spring trembled across the earth.

In those changeful days of sunshine and of rain, when the leaves were unfolding and the early flowers bursting into bloom, it seemed to me that my life was lonely and selfish ; and a flood of tender memories and vague bright hopes swept over me with the spring-time.

Though I lingered still beneath the friendly window-

sill at night, yet all day I was in the Park, basking in the sunshine. Somehow, the Duke of Wellington's statue always lay in my direct road, and made a very pleasant resting-place.

My old friend the sparrow was glad to see me, and Curly, his little daughter, was never tired of listening, with gentle pity, to the tale of my winter hardships. Her father was often away during my visits, for he and his mate had begun to build a new nest. I was never very sorry, for the old sparrow was rather prosy; and when I found Curly alone, her bright eyes were brighter than ever, and her low voice more sweet.

Then there came to me a sunny vision of a nest of my own, that I would make warm and soft enough even for her—and of a little mate waiting for me in the evening, with her bright eyes shining down upon me. At last, one golden evening, at sunset, I told her of my dream; and Curly drew nearer to me, but hung down her little head so that the bright eyes were hid. Then I pretended to fly quite away, disappointed and sorrowful; but before I had got far, Curly's tiny beak caught my wing, and the light touch told me in some magic way that I had not dreamed alone.

I was very foolish, I suppose, and so was Curly, to be so cloudlessly happy. The nests in the air we built would have covered all the trees in Hyde Park, and the lengthening days were never long enough for all we had to do.

I was most unnecessarily important in my choice of a place to build in; and I told Curly that, though window-

sills and such like rough-and-ready places were good enough for me, yet only the greenest tree would satisfy me for her. So we lost a great deal of time, and at last we fixed upon a certain very old hollow oak-tree, standing a little way back from the Serpentine, and aristocratically surrounded by an iron railing. The ivy had grown luxuriantly over it.

We set to work. Often I thought of my poor mother's description of the pleasures of building, as I collected twigs and straws, and bent them into shape, while Curly, near at hand, watched me do the hard work, and put in the finishing touches with her little beak. The building was all very well, but it was nothing to when it came to lining the nest. What long expeditions we made for the softest feathers and the warmest wool! How Curly triumphed when I told her that the moss she had gathered was the best we had ever had; and how merry she was when the "something" very bright which I had seen far off, and flown a long way to get, turned out to be only gossamer shining in the sun.

Well, once in one's life, perhaps, the brightest dreams come true. Before spring deepened into summer, Curly was sitting on her own nest, and my short flights were made alone; for my little mate gravely assured me that she could not answer for the consequences if she left the nest and eggs for even the shortest time. Innocent, happy Curly! the number of times she counted and arranged those wonderful eggs!—the way she insisted on showing me that they were all safe every time I returned

home!—the coaxing, merry twitter that greeted me when I brought her something good, is a pretty picture to remember.

One day I left her very happy, as usual, on her nest. I did not stay away long, but on my return I saw Curly flying round and round the tree, uttering short, sharp cries of agony.

She could not tell me what ailed her. But ah! one look into the ivy-mantled corner which had been our home, told the story but too well. The pretty, cosy nest, built at the cost of so much loving toil, and Curly's treasured eggs, were all gone! I wonder whether boys, when they go out birds'-nesting, ever think of the breaking hearts they leave behind them?

I could not comfort Curly. Day and night she mourned for the little ones that were to have been ours so soon. The brightness that had made my life bright was all gone. I did not think it would have been possible to be so sad, when the summer was so full of joy.

I took her one day to a sunny garden. The lilacs and laburnams were in the flush of their beauty, and the thorn-trees were white with fragrant blossom. Curly looked at it all listlessly, yet I fancied the quiet loveliness lightened her sad little heart.

"Curly," I whispered, "we must try again. We must build another nest."

"Not here," she answered, mournfully. "Only to lose it again. Not here, Joe."

"No, my little Curly, not here. In the calm country, far away, where everything is as lovely, I hear, as in this garden. In the country, where the roses bloom, we will take courage, and try once more. Will you go with me, Curly?"

"I will try, Joe," she said, submissively.

The next day we began our journey. Not joyously as of old, but very slowly and mournfully, Curly and I flew together. We left London with all its sad memories behind. We passed over green fields, and paused in shady woods where merry birds were singing, and there were little ones in many a nest.

We came to calm lakes sleeping in the sun, with hills sloping down towards them, and to open commons, where larks rose from the thick grass and heather, and soared away out of sight. But we stayed nowhere, until one evening we reached the banks of a little stream, sparkling and rippling over its bed of stones. Trees bent down over it, and grass, sweet with wild thyme, rose from its banks.

Curly rested on a gnarled thorn-tree, and listened to the stream's low song; and at last she said, "Joe, let us stay here." And we have stayed here ever since.

We worked steadily, and not unhopefully, to build another nest, often thinking of the old London home we had had for a short bright time. Country neighbours welcomed us very kindly, and I have done my best to be friendly and happy among them. But their ideas and tastes differ widely from mine. Curly knows them all.

In every mother she has found a friend, and in every little one she sees a dim image of what might have been her own.

For myself, I am essentially a London sparrow. I miss the old haunts and friends amongst which I was born and bred. There is something melancholy to me in the silence, broken only by country sounds ; and I long for the monotonous roll of the carriages, the street cries coming to us softened by the distance, and the stir and hum of human life along the busy streets. The times, too, are full of interest to a public-minded sparrow. Trees are being cut down, new walks laid out ; greater changes still may be at hand, and I feel that my right place is amid the struggles and business of my native town.

But now the remembrance of past sorrows is still with me, and I am thankful for this peaceful time, free from care and hardship. And Curly is comforted. For her sake I must always love the country.

My story is ended. Only one word more. Down yonder, at that bend of the river where forget-me-nots grow so thickly on the bank ; in the birch-tree whose long feathery branches dip into the stream, there is a new-built sparrows' nest, and from inside its soft lining there peep three tiny speckled eggs.

There, amid flowers and sunshine, through long summer days and nights, with the bright water gliding by beneath her, and the sweet country air whispering above her head, with a trembling hope thrilling in her heart, my little Curly watches, and is happy.



"So Mrs. Curly is really established in our birch-tree?" said Effie.

The sparrow assented.

"I hope she is comfortable," continued Effie, with an air of courteous interest.

"Very much so, I am thankful to say."

"Do you know what has become of your father?" was the next question.

"I used to meet him sometimes last summer. He is married again, and is very much hen-pecked. His new mate has made him build in Russell Square, where he knows no one, and does not like the situation."

"I am glad of it," said Effie. "Well, Joe, thank you for your story. I shall not forget to inquire how your little mate goes on."

The next day Effie heard the history of a blackbird—a very lugubrious recital; and then a turtle-dove told the story of her life, which was sentimental in the extreme. She was out of doors more than ever, for summer in its prime of beauty could not last much longer. The robin was scarcely earlier astir, and she sometimes went home by moonlight.

One evening she came upon Uncle Walter as she

ascended the steps leading from the sea-shore. He often paced the terrace for a few minutes between the sunset and twilight, with his hat drawn over his eyes, and a book under his arm that it was too dark to read.

"Is that you, child?" he said, stopping in his thoughtful walk. "It is scarcely light enough to know anyone."

"You come out with the bats and the owls, Uncle Walter," said Effie, timidly. She regarded her wise uncle with a mixture of compassion and awe.

"Ah, very likely—quite true;"—for bats were wheeling about in the dim light. "But time is precious—time is very precious. Talking of owls," he resumed, after a moment's silence, "do the birds still speak to you, Effie?"

"More than ever, Uncle Walter."

"Humph!"—and he recommenced his slow walk, muttering something in which "hallucination" was the only word which reached Effie's ears. And it was a great deal too long a word for her comprehension.

She wondered what it meant, as she wandered on the beach next day, and watched the seagulls hovering over the sea.

One seagull flew more steadily than the rest. Coasting along the cliffs, it only now and then touched the waves with its rapid wings.

Effie held up her hand.

"Tell me where you are going in such a hurry?" she exclaimed.

"Home," answered the bird; "I am going home. Do not delay me. I have come far to-day."

"I want to talk to you," said Effie.

"Oh, let me go!" the seagull again entreated. "The tide is coming in, and the waves must be surging over the rocks just beneath our nest. Oh, let me go!"

Effie was leaning over a jutting rock. The water washed and gurgled underneath her feet, so blue and transparent, that she could see through it the pebbles on the beach, and the sea-weed waving to and fro as it was swayed by the quiet waves.

"Tell me about your nest," said Effie. "Is it near here?"

"A few miles farther down the coast, near Michael Leigh's old cottage," replied the bird, wearily, sinking as she spoke on to a little island rock, round which the tide was playing. "Let me go home."

"When I have heard where you have been, and who Michael Leigh is, and all about your nest; but not before."

And, as usual. Effie had her way.



The Seagull's Story.

I'VE watched the sea-bird calmly glide
Unruffled o'er the ocean tide;
Unscared she heard the waters roar
In foaming breakers on the shore;
Fearless of ill, herself she gave
To rise upon the lifting wave,
Or sink to be awhile unseen,
The undulating swells between;
Till, as the evening's shadows grew,
Noiseless, unheard, aloft she flew.
While soaring to her rock-built nest,
A sunbeam lighted on her breast—
A moment glittered in mine eye,
Then quickly vanished through the sky.



“DO you see him, Kate? Can you hear him coming?”
“It is very dark, mother; I can see nothing.”

“Look out again, dear Kate. I fancied I heard footsteps a little while ago.”

“I am afraid it is the wind, I can hear nothing else,” said Kate, closing the cottage door, from which she had been looking as she spoke.

No ; there was very little to be heard on that autumn night, except the rising wind, and the waves beating noisily upon the beach a little below the fisherman's cottage. We seagulls were rejoicing at the stormy sounds, and longing for to-morrow's wild flight across the foaming sea. Meanwhile, we could see the few fishing-boats that were still out making their way rapidly towards the land, looking like tossing specks upon the waste of waters. I could have told Kate that her brother's boat was safely hauled upon the shore; but it was not for him they were watching and waiting that evening.

"Mother," said Kate, cheerfully, as she bent to draw together the scattered embers of the fire, "we must wait a little. Willie will soon be home."

Her mother sank back wearily from her listening attitude. "And Michael, too," she said, in a low voice.

Kate glanced at the eight-day clock which was ticking loudly in the corner, and turned back to her mother with a smile that was intended to cover rather an uneasy look.

"Michael won't be angry," she said, confidently. "What would he say if he knew how we dreaded his coming? You are getting afraid of your good son, mother."

"Poor Michael!" said Mrs. Leigh, sighing. "Are you never afraid of him, Katie?"

"Not I," said Kate, with rather a proud smile.

"I shouldn't be if it wasn't for Willie. Listen!" she said, interrupting herself, and a man's step was heard coming up the steep narrow path among the rocks.

The heavy waves dashed, and the wind whistled round the cottage; but the two listeners heard the firm steady footsteps through both sounds. Kate rose from her kneeling position before the fire, and her mother said, "It is Michael."

The latch was lifted as she spoke, and a tall dark man entered the house. He gave a quick glance round the room, and approaching his sick mother, asked her gently how she was.

"Pretty well—pretty well, Michael," she said, in a hurried timid way, looking up at him as she spoke in an appealing manner, that he did not appear to notice.

He stood for a minute or two silent, and then approaching Kate, asked in a low voice, "Where is Willie?"

Kate was very busy preparing supper, and singing to herself. She only stopped to say carelessly, "I don't know."

"Then he has not been home?" said Michael.

Kate knew instinctively by the stern tone how his face had darkened.

"*She* is very ill and weak to-night," she said, motioning to her mother, out of whose sight they were standing.

"Is she?"

"Yes; so be gentle, Michael."

Michael moved his foot impatiently. "The old story!" he said, bitterly. "Some day it will be too late for gentleness, and then——"

"Then what, Michael?"

"You do not know—how should you?—where all this will lead to in time,—disgrace, and misery, and shame!"

Kate raised her hand imploringly, to check his vehement tone. "Michael, while it is possible, spare her!"

"He is later and later every night," resumed Michael, in a lower voice; but he paused again, for the cottage door was opened, and a blast of wind, a large rough dog, and a young man entered it together.

"Willie, is it you?" said Mrs. Leigh, raising herself gladly.

"Yes, mother, here I am. How are you?" And the new-comer went down to receive her eager kiss of welcome.

"Michael not come in?" he asked, glancing round the room with some satisfaction, as he stood before the fire, the flickering light playing on his handsome face and curling brown hair.

"Yes," said Michael, coming forward. "I have been in for some time."

Willie shrugged his shoulders. "Then I am in for a lecture," he said, composing himself to listen. Michael, however, seemed less ready with one than usual. "It is long past supper-time," was all he said.

"Is it?" answered Willie, carelessly.

"You know you are late, I suppose?"

"You may spare your breath to cool your porridge this time, Michael," rejoined Willie. "I had supper at the farm."

"Oh!"

Michael had no more to say, and Willie looked triumphant. Mrs. Leigh's eyes had followed the speakers wistfully, now she leaned back in her chair with a sigh of relief. There was a silence while Michael ate his solitary supper, and Willie leant against the chimney-piece and whistled. Then Michael took down the Bible from the shelf, and read a chapter in his deep stern voice; and after prayers Mrs. Leigh went upstairs, leaving Michael with folded arms and bent head gazing into the fire, while Willie talked and laughed with Kate, as he helped her to clear away the supper.

No boat was better known on the coast than that of young Michael Leigh; the first to be pushed off to sea

in the morning, the last to be driven in by stormy weather.

Many a night when we seagulls turned homewards at dusk, we left his boat rocking on the rough waves, and when we reached the cliffs, could dimly see it far out at sea, its sail scarcely distinguishable from the foam.

Michael's father and grandfather had been fishermen before him, and both were lost at sea years ago. One stormy night their boat went down, when they were so near the land that they could see the light in the window at home, and the gleam of the breakers upon the rocks above which the cottage stood.

It was a lonely spot, that fisherman's cottage, built half-way up the cliff. A rough path led to it, and headlands jutting out into the sea on either side shut the little strip of beach beneath into a miniature bay by itself. On one side there was a deep cave, where the waves could be heard thundering and echoing with a different sound from the monotonous dash of the water on the shore. Our nest was perched on a narrow ledge of rocks that seemed to tremble when the waves rushed into the cave beneath. It was on the side of a precipice, where the foot of man could never tread; beneath us was nothing but the sea, and overhead a fissure in the rocks let in a bit of sky.

There came a time that autumn when Michael Leigh's boat lay always hauled up idly on the beach, and neither the wild gales that always visit the coast at that time of year, nor the calm sunny weather intervening between

them, found him at sea. Sometimes he stood before the cottage door, and his grave look had deepened into sadness.

Kate crept about the house with a hushed step and heavy eyes, and stole back at intervals into the room upstairs, where their mother lay dying, with Willie watching beside her. Hour after hour he stood leaning over the end of the bed, or sat quietly with his mother's thin hand clasping his. She was seldom easy unless he was beside her, and he was a wonderfully tender and patient nurse, scarcely caring to move even when she slept, but sitting on near the fire, with his youngest sister, little Amy, on his knee.

Often when the dying woman was alone with Michael, she would commit his brother to his care, praying him with many tears to be gentle and patient with Willie. Michael promised; but to be patient and gentle were hard things to him, especially with one so unstable as Willie.

At last Mrs. Leigh died—died in Michael's arms, but her two hands were clasped in Willie's, and her fading eyes fixed to the last upon the son so passionately beloved. They laid her in the churchyard by the sea, and the rolling waves beneath which her husband lay came moaning round her grave.

The next day Michael's boat was out again. As it ploughed its way to sea, he looked back with a heavy heart towards the shore. There, growing dim in the distance, lay the home where so many new duties and

anxieties from henceforth rested upon him, and there too was the churchyard where slept the gentle mother whom he had loved deeply, though very silently. And Kate and little Amy watched the boat as long as they could. It was something familiar in the changed life that was opening before them to see the dark speck rising and falling upon the green waters, and to know that Michael was there. They were quite alone, for Willie was gone as usual to their grandfather's farm, some miles away across the downs, where he was learning to be a farmer.

The day seemed very long, and Kate's household occupations were soon over. Before the afternoon closed in she joined her little sister on the rocks, and they waited there till dusk, watching for Willie's step, or straining their eyes out to sea for the first glimpse of the returning fishing-boats. Willie was the first to come home, and they stirred the fire into a blaze, and sat round it waiting for Michael. When he came, little Amy ran to meet him; he bent down gravely and kissed her; then, as he seated himself in his mother's empty chair by the chimney-corner, they were all silent for a time, and each felt that their new life had begun.

The spring had returned, and the evening sunshine was casting its yellow light across the meadows and sloping fields of Longhurst Farm.

A waggon had just turned in from the fields, and was being unloaded; the team of big handsome cart-horses, Tag, Rag, and Bobtail, standing quietly, but occasionally

tossing their heads and flinging their scarlet tassels into the air.

The distant sound of the sheep-bell came tinkling across the downs, and numbers of cocks and hens were running about in front of the big barn, busily collecting their evening meal. Farmer Weston, a white-haired, ruddy old man, mounted on a stout cob, was opening the gate, and near the house stood his grand-daughter, Maggie. She was shading her eyes from the declining sun with one hand, and in the other she held an enormous golden ball of cowslips.

"Give my love to Kate," she was saying; "and, Willie, do bring over Amy for a long day to pick cowslips, and see the little pigs."

"You must get Michael's leave," returned Willie Leigh, with a laugh. "No one dares stir now in our house without his consent."

Maggie looked at him rather anxiously.

"He means it all so kindly," she said, softly. "And, Willie, you know you promised me to be very good."

"I never am good, Maggie," he answered, with a touch of sadness peeping through the bright carelessness of his tone.

Maggie looked at him, and smiled. She was a fair, slight girl, not exactly pretty, but with one of those sweet faces that it rests one to look upon; and Willie's eyes softened as they looked into hers.

"If people believed in one," he began; "but, Maggie, you don't know the everlasting bore of living with Michael;

and Kate has taken to quoting him, just as poor mother used to do."

"Kate is anxious about you," said Maggie, and as she spoke the colour rushed into Willie's cheeks. "I wish she would let me alone," he muttered.

"Last winter," continued his cousin, hesitating and looking down, "don't you remember how easy it seemed, just after your poor mother's death, to do as she had wished; but, oh! Willie, forgive me—they are not good friends that you meet at the Royal Oak, and——"

"You too, Maggie!" interrupted Willie, angrily. Then checking himself, he added, reproachfully, "So they make *you* believe all they choose to say of me. Well, of course you all think it will be a push in the right direction if you turn against me too."

"I turn against you, Willie!" said Maggie, with a quiet smile,

"You had better," resumed Willie. "Come, Maggie, help to hang the dog that you all give such a bad name to."

"Poor old dog!" said Maggie, patting his shoulder.

The farmer rode up to them before they could say more, and slowly dismounted, while Round Robin, the fat cob, turned his bright eyes wistfully round, and tried to nibble the cowslips in Maggie's hand.

"No, Robin," she said, stroking his substantial shoulder. "These are for little Amy, if Willie would only carry them safe."

Willie took them, grumbling; but clasped Maggie's fingers tightly as they passed from her hand into his. He

bid them good evening, and went his way across the downs towards the sea-shore.

"Be here early to-morrow for the spring sowing," called the farmer after him; and as Willie looked back to answer, he saw Maggie still standing before the door, with her grandfather leaning on her shoulder, and Round Robin's nose placidly rubbing her arm. Somehow, the golden flowers he carried seemed to guide him straight home, leading him in safety even past the Royal Oak.

The same sunset was sparkling across the sea. The retreating tide had left bare a shining strip of sand, and the little pools of water gleamed like diamonds set in the half-dried rocks. Here and there a star-fish, forgotten by its native waves, lay lazily dreaming of the returning tide, or a crab started in a hopeless pursuit after the ebbing waters. Many of the seagulls had reached the cliffs already, and I reluctantly bade the waves good night, and received a parting shower of spray upon my wings.

Michael Leigh and his partner, old Jack Humphreys, were mending their boat upon the beach. Jack was whistling, and Michael hammering lustily, while from the rocks above came gay snatches of a song in a clear childish voice.

Little Amy was climbing up and down, springing almost like a bird from rock to rock, shouting and laughing at each one of the numberless surprises that old Ocean had left behind him for her, or sinking her voice to a murmured song as she sailed cockle-shells upon some mimic sea. The fresh sea-breeze was browning her rosy cheeks and brightening her eyes, and now and then a treacherous

wave came tumbling unexpectedly back, flooding a stone that its brethren had deserted several minutes before, and eddying gaily round the little tripping feet.

Amy came nearer and nearer to the cliffs, and clambered fearlessly up steep rocks, on the side of some of which wet, soft, green seaweed was growing, which made them slippery and dangerous. I had often watched her steady little figure thread those dangerous places. Now she ceased her song, and glanced down a deep fissure leading to a shell-incrusted bit of shingle. I saw her prepare to go down with a grave face of half alarm, half excitement. The first few steps were safely taken, then her foot slipped; she grasped at the bare rock with a scream, and she fell—fell far down on the beach below!

Michael and Jack Humphreys paused simultaneously in their hammering and whistling, as the child's scream rang upon the air. Even Kate heard it from the house above, and came rushing down. Half-way she met Michael, bearing in his arms a little motionless form, a white still face resting on his shoulder.

The angel of Death that had come last autumn to Michael Leigh's house, bearing away the mother, a weary traveller, to her rest, returned now, and hovered, waiting with folded wings for the burden of the child's fresh life.

Kate and Maggie Weston watched her for long nights and days, fearing much and hoping very little; but at last the overhanging shadow faded away, and the child struggled back again into life.

Michael was out fishing when the faint hope they had

scarcely ventured to grasp brightened into certainty. With the prospect of the heavy doctor's bill, he did not dare waste the spring days on shore.

One evening as he returned, Kate met him with flushed cheeks and tearful eyes.

"Michael, she will live!" she whispered huskily.

She saw a quiver and gleam of intense joy pass over his grave face.

"Praise be to God!" he said, raising his hat. He stood for a long while looking towards the sunset. Kate lingered near him, conscious that he was still thanking God, yet missing, in his silent gravity, Willie's burst of joy, that had first seemed to bring the realisation of gladness to her own heart.

Presently Michael went in to look at Amy. The rosy brown cheeks were all gone, and the dark eyes looked gravely out of the little white face, as if they were trying mournfully to read the strange lesson that so much suffering must be sent to teach.

Michael laid his hand upon her head.

"God bless you, little one!" he said, gently.

"Good-night, brother," answered the little girl, and the wearied eyelids sunk over her eyes.

"Kate," said Maggie, the next evening, as they stood together at the window of Amy's room, "I must go home to-morrow."

"Oh, Maggie, must you? It is such a comfort having you here!"

Amy was asleep, there was no light in the room except

that of the moonbeams, and the two girls spoke in subdued voices.

"I am very sorry," resumed Maggie, "but they want me at the farm. Grandfather said he should send for me to-morrow."

"They can't want you half as much as I do," said Kate. "What can you have to do at home?"

"Churning, baking, cooking," answered Maggie, with a smile. "The last bread was uneatable, poor grandfather said; and the butter was too salt."

Kate gave a great sigh.

"Amy is much better now," continued her cousin, consolingly. "You won't miss me so much."

"I don't know what there is in you," said Kate, "but everything seems to go on right when you are in the house. I don't know how I shall get on alone now. Things will all begin going wrong again directly you are gone. No, not about Amy," as Maggie glanced towards the bed—"other things."

"My dear, bright Katie"—and Maggie put her arm fondly round her—"I can't bear to see you look so unlike your old self. I wish you had no troubles."

"I think I have had enough to sober most people," said Kate. "But, Maggie, you cannot tell the rest of having you here. Willie comes home every evening, and Michael is satisfied."

Maggie did not answer immediately, and Kate sunk her voice even lower.

"If you only knew what it was in the winter," she went

on—"the fears about Willie, which I had to keep to myself, for fear of making Michael angry with him. How often I have watched for him, and he never came; and Michael, so stern and severe, making Willie go on worse than ever. And now, poor little Amy! Oh, Maggie!"

Maggie stroked her hair tenderly.

"If Michael were only more gentle." Kate began again. "Somehow, everything he says seems to provoke Willie; and, Maggie, to see mother's Willie going all wrong."

Maggie covered her face with her hands for a moment; when she looked up again, her voice was almost as calm as usual.

"We must trust for Willie, and pray for him," she said. "Kate, dearest, his mother's prayers will not be thrown away."

Amy picked no cowslips at the farm that spring. The little pigs she was to have visited grew up into respectable porkers, and the fields which had been freshly sown at the time of the accident were all green with young wheat now. We missed her often on the shore, where her favourite pink shells and seaweed lay ungathered, and where laughing waves dancing upon the beach seemed to summon their old playfellow in vain.

Sickness was very strange to little Amy. She tried hard to be patient; but there were times when nothing that Kate could do would please her—when even Willie's caressing gaiety or the rare tenderness of the grave Michael failed to charm away her weariness.

"I am sure you ought to be very grateful, Amy," said Aunt Miriam to her one morning. Aunt Miriam was a brisk, middle-aged matron, with cheeks like rosy-withered apples, and a face and manner of inveterate cheerfulness. She had come from the village to help Kate in some of her household business, and was now sweeping round Amy's bed, enveloping her in a cloud of dust, and making innumerable motes dance in the stream of sunshine that filled the room.

"I am not grateful," said the plaintive voice from the bed. "It is so hot and dusty; and where is Kate?"

"Just look at your room," pursued Aunt Miriam, beginning to polish the chest of drawers energetically. "Why, it's a sight! You're just a spoilt child, Amy."

Amy shut her eyes. "I don't want to see the room," she said; "I'm tired of it."

"Come, child, that's naughty; such a picture as it is. Everybody thinking of something to send you, and you not wanting to see it! What would some little girls give for your pretty things!"

Tender hands and loving hearts had indeed assembled many treasures round the child's sick-bed. A bright-yellow canary, Michael's gift, chirped and whistled in the window; a bunch of wild flowers, freshly picked by Willie, filled one glass, and another held the choicest roses from Maggie's garden; Farmer Weston sent baskets of strawberries from the farm, and Jack Humphreys walked for miles along the coast, and perilled his old limbs in many a dangerous place, to find some rare shell that the little

one would like. But ah! Kate often thought, even when her eyes were glistening with gratitude for the pretty love-tokens, if Amy could only have picked one red strawberry herself from among the green leaves—if her little weary feet could have danced along the golden sand but once again!

"Kate," said Amy, in the evening, when a great calm had succeeded all the sweeping and dusting of the day; "I don't like Aunt Miriam!"

"Oh, Amy!" remonstrated Kate.

"I don't. She said I ought to be grateful, and I'm not. And oh, Kate, I'm so tired, and my back aches!"

"My poor little one!" Kate knelt down beside the bed.

"Oh, dear! I wish the sea would not go on moaning and dashing; I wish it would be quiet; Kate, will it never stop?" And Amy made a feeble, impatient effort to rise, and fell back helplessly.

"Don't listen to it, dear," said Kate. "Shall I sing to you?"

"No, don't. Oh, Katie, why ought I to be grateful? It seems so hard never to be able to go out."

"Hush, Amy!" said Michael's voice; "that is wrong!"

Amy's eyes grew large with wonder, and then filled with tears.

"Don't, Michael," said Kate. "It is hard for her."

"No," continued Michael. "it is not really hard, because God sent it. You must try and be patient, Amy!" And sitting down beside the bed, Michael lifted one of

the little hands in his own, and holding it gently, he talked to her in a grave, deep way, that, though she only half understood it, calmed the throbbing heart back again to rest.

They were haymaking at the farm by this time. Maggie Weston stood one hot noonday underneath some spreading hedgerow-trees that bordered the great hay-field, and watched the summer work go merrily on. A young man, in the dress of a gamekeeper, stood near her, leaning on his gun, and followed by two dogs, one of which now lay blinking in the sunshine, but the other stood close by him, looking up with bright, inquiring eyes, and tail sympathetically depressed, into his master's down-cast face.

"I am very sorry, Geoffrey," Maggie was saying, earnestly.

"Thank you," he answered. "It was my fault. I ought never to have thought that it could be."

"I know you would have been very good to me," said Maggie, "but ——"

Her eyes wandered away to the haymakers. They were loading the waggon, and mounted on the top of the piled-up hay stood Willie, his lithe figure the most active of any, and the sunshine falling full upon his handsome face.

Geoffrey Brandon's eyes followed Maggie's.

"I know," he said. "But, Maggie, I feel as if I could not trust you to him. If it were anyone else, or if he were more steady ——"

"Hush!" interrupted Maggie, gently; "you must not speak so." She sighed as she spoke, and put her hand over her eyes; then holding it out to Geoffrey, she said, "Good-bye, Geoffrey—God bless you!"

He took the hand, and held it for a moment silently, and then echoing her last words, "God bless you!" he went slowly away, with all the brightness of that June morning darkened around him.

The bell from the farmhouse rang for the haymakers' dinner, and as they all dispersed to rest under the shady hedges, Willie came across the field to join his cousin.

"Hot work!" he began, as he threw himself down on the grass beside her, and took off his straw hat. "Why, Maggie, what ails you? what has vexed you?" For she did not speak directly.

"Some one has been worrying you," he continued rapidly, raising himself on his elbow to look into her face. "That fellow Geoffrey Brandon—he has been asking you to marry him. You won't do it, Maggie?—you won't fail me?" He was standing upright by this time, and grasping her hand.

"You know I never will," answered Maggie, looking up at him with her clear, faithful eyes.

"Yes, I know it," he said, relaxing his grasp, and drawing a longer breath. "I am weak enough, God knows. I do not know what would become of me, if the one thing which holds me to right were to be taken away."

"But you will try, Willie?" whispered Maggie; and the brown eyes were full of tears now.

"I will, dearest," he answered sadly. "Oh, my Maggie! I must be very bad if even an angel's hand cannot keep me from harm."

And so, amid the many fears that Maggie only whispered in her prayers, she thanked God for this strong hope, and went on trusting, while the summer passed away, and autumn reigned instead.

It had been a bad season for fishing; often I saw the nets drawn up almost empty. Michael looked grave and anxious, and told Kate to be careful. She took fewer walks to the shop of the fishing village round the point, and she sang less merrily over her work.

"Troubles never come alone," she said one day to Maggie. "Amy gets no better, and now you are going away."

For Maggie had been sent for to go and nurse a sick aunt who lived in London. She went very reluctantly. Something in her own heart answered to the look of vague fear she saw in Kate's face when she told her she was going.

"I wish it could have been otherwise," she said, sighing. "I shall try to get home again soon; and, Kate, you will let me know what the great doctor thinks of Amy."

"I am very hopeful about it," said Kate, brightening. "Doctor Graves says he is so clever."

Neither spoke the thought that was in both their minds. Willie's name was seldom mentioned between them now.

Maggie went away, and by-and-by the great surgeon from London was brought by their own doctor to visit little Amy.

Michael was waiting outside when they left the house. They stood for some time talking to him, and the strange doctor shook his hand kindly when he went away.

"I am very sorry for the poor child," were his last words. "She may grow stronger in health, but I fear there is no chance of her ever walking again."

It was growing dark when Michael went in. Kate was kneeling before the kitchen fire as he entered, intent on toasting some delicate slices of bread. She did not speak or look up as he came to the fireplace, but turned away her head, that he might not see her swelled eyelids and flushed cheeks.

"Who is that for?" asked Michael, after a moment.

"For Amy's tea." Kate spoke the name with a soft reverence, almost as if it belonged to one newly dead.

"You spoke to Doctor Forrest?"

"Yes, Michael."

"And I see he told you everything?"

"Yes," repeated Kate, huskily.

"Poor Kate!" said her brother.

Kate's mouth quivered, and she put up her hand to brush away the tears that blinded her.

"Our little Amy—so young!" she said presently.

Michael looked down into the fire and made no answer.

"Michael," said Kate, "God forgive me for saying so, but it seems too hard."

"Hush!" said Michael, sternly, as if rebuking his own thoughts. "Don't say or think such things."

"I know it is wrong; but never to walk again! Poor child—poor little darling! she need not know it, but still ——"

"What?" interrupted Michael, raising his head suddenly.

"We need never tell her," repeated Kate; "but if she asks what the doctor says, what can we say?"

"The truth," said Michael.

"Oh, Michael!"

"No falsehood would lessen the pain."

"Not a falsehood! But, dear Michael, don't crush all her hopes at once. Just think of one's whole life being blighted! Have pity, Michael; leave her a little hope."

"But if it is a false hope?"

"The awakening will come soon enough. She must find it out herself; let it come to her gently and gradually."

"And leave her to the sickness of hope deferred. Kate, you judge wrongly: I would rather, far rather know the worst at once."

"You would—a great strong man; but she is a little sick child. Michael, be merciful."

"Truth is merciful," said Michael. "Her trouble is hard enough, poor child; I will not have her tortured by false kindness."

"I cannot tell her," said Kate.

"Then I will."

"And I can't take up her tea—I can't go to her—I can't see her face!" continued Kate, vehemently.

Michael collected the tea-things quietly on the little tray, and took it up. He paused by Kate, who was rocking herself backwards and forwards with her face buried in her apron.

"Kate," he said, laying his hand on her shoulder, "you know I don't want to be harsh. God help me to be gentle!"

There was such an unusual break in Michael's steady tones, that Kate looked up startled; and as he went slowly away she realised that, though he could not depart from what he thought true and right, yet even she could not be more gentle to the little one.

Amy was very much amused and delighted by her brother's bringing her tea to her. She did not inquire for Kate, but lay contentedly watching him as he tried to arrange everything according to her fancy.

"You are very kind to me to-night, Mike," she said, as he carefully buttered the toast and filled the little blue mug with tea.

"Am I, Amy?"

"Sit down here, and watch me, and talk to me."

Michael obeyed as far as sitting down and looking at her went, but he did not say much, and Amy's tiny meal was disposed of almost in silence..

"Are you tired, Mike?" she said, as he took away her plate. "It looked rather rough at sea to-day; I watched your boat coming in."

"Did you, Amy?"

"Yes; and I wanted so much to be out on the rocks. Michael, what did the doctor say about me?" she continued, raising herself suddenly on her pillows. "Did he say I should soon be well?"

"Not soon, Amy, I am afraid."

"Not soon! I am so tired of bed," said little Amy, wearily. "When spring comes, though," she resumed in a more hopeful tone, "and there are little lambs and violets at Longhurst, I shall run about then, shan't I, Mike?"

"My poor child," said Michael, tenderly, "God, who made the violets and everything, has seen fit to send a great trial to you. Do you think you can bear it, Amy?"

Amy's finger fell from the buttonhole of his coat, into which she had twisted it, and she lay back with a startled look of intent listening. He knelt down by her pillow, and went on:—

"I am afraid, Amy, you will not soon be well. The doctor thinks you will get stronger, but he says you were so much hurt by your fall, that you will never run about and walk again."

"Never, Mike?" said Amy, very quietly.

"I am afraid not."

"Am I going to die, Mike?" she asked, opening her eyes after a long silence.

"No, thank God—no! I have told you all the truth. By-and-by I may carry you down to the beach, and you will see the waves and the seagulls ——"

"I wanted so to run!" said Amy, as she pushed away the hand Michael had laid upon her own.

Michael took away his hand, and said nothing.

"Are you very sorry, Mike?" asked his little sister.

"Very, child—very."

"Take me in your arms, then."

Still kneeling, her brother put his arms round her, and drew her head down upon his shoulder.

"I was naughty," she whispered. Michael bent down, and kissed her; she lay very quietly on his breast, with her eyes looking upward. Presently she murmured something, in which he caught the words "brother" and "be patient;" and once she looked up and said, "You are sure he said never, Mike?"

"I am afraid I am," was the mournful answer.

She put up her hand to stroke his cheek. "Never mind, Mike; I will try to be good."

"God help you, little one!"

Michael did not move for a long time. Amy fell asleep upon his shoulder, and the autumn twilight gathered round them both.

Looking back in after times, Kate often acknowledged to herself that Michael had judged more wisely than she had. A strange patience grew up gradually in little Amy, though for a time the hopelessness of her doom seemed to have half broken her heart.

Once Willie, indignant at what he called Michael's cruelty, tried to cheer her by telling her that it was all a mistake, and that she would get quite well soon. It went

to Kate's heart to see the colour rush into Amy's cheeks, and the wistful eyes turn eagerly from Willie to herself.

"Do not deceive her, Willie."

The flush of hope faded again, and Amy said, "Michael said, never!" There was a look in her face as she turned away that prevented even Willie from saying more.

But she was quite a child still; she did not always dwell upon her troubles, and by-and-by her little low laugh made music in Kate's heart.

Sometimes, when she was very tired or in pain, she would ask for a story. Michael would consider for a moment or two, and then, in a painstaking, matter-of-fact way, begin the story of Joseph in the pit, or of the shepherd-boy killing the lion and the bear.

Amy listened for a moment. "Oh, that is David!" she would say, with evident discomposure, "and Goliath is coming presently. I know it all so well."

Michael stopped, not offended, but rather shocked.

"Now, Mike," she said, coaxingly, "tell me a fairy tale, as Willie does."

"Fairy tales are all a pack of rubbish, child."

"But some story that isn't David, nor Samuel, nor Moses," as she saw signs of these inevitable beginnings.

If she were really ill, and Michael very anxious to please her, this resulted in his rashly embarking in a story about two little girls, and becoming hopelessly involved, and dreadfully puzzled as to what they could or would do. The story had to be abandoned, and Amy fell back upon wistful questions about the rocks, and the boat, and the

seagulls that floated past out among the waves. But when Maggie was at home, her Bible stories were marvels of prettiness; and Willie's memory had retained all the fairylore of his childhood: so Amy's thoughts floated in an ideal world, something between heaven and fairyland.

Many a winter's evening Willie spent, telling her the marvellous stories and wild legends of the coast, that somehow clung more to his memory than all the learning which he ought to have acquired at school.

They were questionable lessons, perhaps, for his little sister; but the pleasure they gave was not doubtful, and to Willie it was far pleasanter to lounge in Amy's room upstairs, with her admiring eyes fixed upon him, and all her pillows to make him comfortable, than to sit stiff and silent in the sanded kitchen below, listening to the ticking of the eight-day clock and the click of Kate's knitting-needles, while Michael read some grave-looking book in the chimney-corner. Those evenings were unbearable to Willie's sociable nature. With Amy he was, at all events, sure of a hearing and a welcome. How deep her love was for him, and how intense her admiration, she never told anyone. It was deepened rather than lessened by the dim consciousness that there was something wrong about this dearest and handsomest of brothers.

"Kate," said Willie, turning round from the window one dark night, when Michael was out fishing, and he and Kate were alone, "I want to speak to you."

"Yes," she answered, startled by his sudden change of

tone, for he had kept Amy laughing all the evening until she had fallen asleep quite exhausted, and now he spoke in a low, troubled voice; "what is it, Willie?"

Willie approached the fire, and stirred the embers moodily with his foot.

"I wish —— Do you think Michael would give me some money?"

"Oh, Willie!"

"Well," said Willie, sharply, "you don't suppose it's very pleasant to want it, or to have to ask for it, do you?"

"What do you want it for?" asked Kate, sighing.

"That's my own affair," began Willie; then he added, in a lower voice, "The fact is, I am in trouble. If I could have a little money now, it would clear me."

"I don't think Michael can," said Kate. "It has been a bad year for fishing. How could you get into debt, Willie?"

"Don't go on like that," said Willie, restlessly. "I couldn't help it. How can a man stay at home, when Michael makes it so hateful?"

"Dear Willie—dear Willie!" said Kate, "I hoped so that you were trying to do better. You know you promised Maggie ——"

"Don't talk of Maggie," groaned Willie, laying his head down upon the mantelpiece. "Oh! I wish she hadn't gone away! Kate," he added presently, "you *must* get Michael to help me, that I may be clear before she comes home. You don't know what it would do for me."

"I will try," said Kate, sadly; "but you know Michael."

"I do know how cold-hearted he is. He wouldn't move a finger for me."

"Willie, how can you be so unjust?"

"It is true, Kate. If I could ever have gone to him and thought he would be like a brother, it might have been different. I wish it were, Kate. Kate, if I could live my life over again!"

Kate put her arm round him, and for a long time they stood talking in low voices by the fire.

The next day Kate summoned up all her courage, and made Willie's request to Michael. He heard her in silence.

"Where is Willie?" he asked, when she had ended.

"I will send him."

"I cannot do anything for you," said Michael, when his brother came; "I wonder you could ask it."

The colour rushed into Willie's cheeks at the cold tone, and he turned away with a careless shrug of the shoulders; then paused a moment, and looked back at his brother.

"Michael," he said, hesitatingly, "I don't want to bother you, but if you would listen to me——"

"It is no use."

"I know," continued Willie, sadly, "I have not deserved anything from you; but, Michael, I thought perhaps you would care to help me, if you knew——"

"You have said all this before," said Michael, coldly.

Willie spoke again in a moment, keeping his calm tone with an effort.

"If you could be merciful! Michael," and he laid his hand lightly on his brother's shoulder, "it isn't only for myself I ask it."

"So much the worse," said Michael, his face darkening. "No money of mine shall ever go to pay such debts as yours. No one shall say I helped you in the creditable course you have chosen."

"I have done my best," said Willie, his voice trembling a little. "Some day, if you are sorry, remember that you might have saved me if you would. I wanted to be free!"

"It seems so," answered Michael, in the same unmoved tone. "You have been doing everything to show it lately, haven't you?"

"Very well," said Willie, "that's quite enough—I am not going to stand any more. It can't be helped, and I must do the best I can now!" And he left the cottage.

Kate tried, in a hopeless kind of way, to alter Michael's determination; but he stopped her sternly. He and Willie seldom spoke to each other now. Willie went his own way unchecked. An additional shade of recklessness had come over his manner, and silent care was beginning to draw deep furrows on Michael's brow.

They seemed to be growing poorer. Their daily fare was coarse and scanty, and even little Amy's simple dainties were curtailed.

"It is no use asking, Kate," Michael said, shortly. "We can't buy what we have no money to pay for!"

One evening the child turned away from the supper Kate brought her. She did not complain—only smiled a little wan smile, and said she was not hungry. Kate took away the untouched plate, and sitting down before the kitchen fire, began to cry.

Willie left the house, but presently returned.

"Look here!" he said. "Don't you think Amy could eat this?" And as he spoke, he laid one of a brace of partridges he carried upon the table before her.

"Oh, Willie!" exclaimed Kate, shrinking back.

"Well?" said her brother, smiling.

"Did you buy it?"

"No," he answered, with a laugh. "Come, Kate, you knew I sometimes had a shot for fun."

"Poaching, Willie?" said Kate.

"Well, poaching if you will! What's in a name? I was determined the little one should have something better to eat than the stuff you gave her to-day. Come! Katie, be quick and cook it. Make it good!"

"Willie! Willie! how could you?"

"How could I? I'm a good shot, I can tell you! Why, Kate, there's nothing to look miserable about. Besides, isn't there some wise saying about the end justifying the means?"

"What would Michael say?" continued Kate, sadly. "Take it away, Willie! I hate seeing it, and I won't cook it!"

"Then I will," returned Willie. "Only I sha'n't make it as good as you would. Now, Katie!" and he adopted the coaxing tone that she found most difficult to resist, "Just think how much good this would do little Amy! You forget the little sick child; you only care for Michael. Be a good sister to Amy and me, just for once, old Katie."

Kate touched the plumage of the fine bird which lay before her, and Amy's pale face rose to her imagination.

"It would only be wasted, now it is here," added Willie. "Anybody would tell you to take what you can't avoid, and make the best of it."

"Would Michael?" asked Kate; but Willie only laughed and said, "What is the best way to cook partridge?" And Kate yielded.

When it was ready, Willie insisted upon carrying it upstairs himself.

Innocent little Amy never guessed that there was any harm in the tempting supper that her brother brought her.

"I got it for you," was answer sufficient to satisfy her, and to give double relish to what she thought the very best thing she had ever tasted.

"For I am hungry now," she said complacently.

She was propped up by pillows to eat it, with Willie kneeling beside her, his bright face close to hers, and his triumphant glances wandering from her to Kate as she stood silently by.

Amy had scarcely begun her supper when a footstep sounded in the room below, and then came up the stairs—a firm tread, that they all knew well.

"Caught, I declare!" ejaculated Willie, half laughing. Kate turned rather pale. Michael opened the door; his face softened as he saw Willie kneeling by Amy's bed.

"Oh, Michael!" said the child, "come and see what a good supper Willie has brought me."

Michael came forward; there was a moment's silence, and then he looked in his brother's face. Willie met the glance with one of careless defiance.

"Poaching?" said Michael, very quietly.

Willie nodded.

"Amy," said Michael, turning to her, "you must not eat that. It is wrong."

His little sister laid down her fork immediately, and looked from one to the other with wondering eyes.

"That bird is stolen," continued Michael. "If I were to let you eat it, it would be letting you share the theft. Do you understand?"

Amy pushed away the plate, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Michael, Michael," whispered Kate, "don't speak in that way of him to the little one!"

"Let him be, Kate," said Willie, his lip curling.

Michael took Amy's plate and carried it away.

"And that is what you call goodness!" broke in Willie, passionately. "If so, I hope I may never come near it. I call it cold-blooded cruelty and self-righteousness!"

He sprang down the stairs as he spoke, and they heard the cottage door slam behind him the next moment. Michael left the room silently, and Kate sat down, and

taking her sister in her arms, they both cried long and bitterly.

It was late in December before Maggie returned home. They did not see her at the cottage until the day before Christmas Eve, when she came over to see Amy, and to make Kate promise that she would leave her sister in Aunt Miriam's care the next evening, and come to the festivities at the Farm.

"It will make all the difference to me, having you there, Katie," she said as she went away.

Kate thought her looking sad, but she did not speak of Willie, except to mention that he had been helping her all the morning to decorate the Farm with evergreens.

Christmas Eve came. The outer world lay shrouded in dim white and black shadow, the moonlight on the snow. A sharp night to be out in! Jack Frost's silent fingers were busily forming icicles to sparkle in tomorrow's sun, and the wind as it whistled past tried in vain to ruffle the frozen surface of the water.

Chance travellers passing within sight of Longhurst Farm would have thought that the ruddy streams of light pouring from some of its lattice windows looked doubly warm and cheerful from their contrast with the cold without. And certainly the great kitchen at the farm was just the sort of scene that night, upon which the spirit of Old Father Christmas would have looked down with a smile. Giant logs on the wide hearth sent the flames roaring and rejoicing up the chimney. Holly branches hung glitter-

ing from the oak rafters, wreaths of evergreens graced the walls, and a great bough of mistletoe was suspended from the ceiling. The confused hum of many voices and of much laughter rang on the genial air. The village fiddlers played their best and loudest, and at the end of the room stood Farmer Weston, watching with what right good-will his guests threaded the merry mazes of a country dance.

Supper, with its rounds of beef, mince-pies, and plum-pudding, and all its toasts and cheering, was over. The good old Christmas games, "Hunt the Slipper," and "Blind Man's Buff," had come to an end at last. It was nearly time to go home, which rendered this concluding dance all the livelier. Couple after couple joined the line. The fiddlers played faster than ever. The tramp and shuffle of country-made shoes across the sanded floor, as the dancers tried to catch the flying music, had well-nigh drowned the voices and the laughter, and the very fiddles themselves. The group of old men sitting over their bowl of steaming punch in the chimney-corner, took their pipes from their mouths, and stopped their talk to laugh and nod their heads, as the gay tune ended and began again with tireless rapidity.

Michael Leigh leant against the door watching the dancers, his foot moving quickly on the floor with a gesture of mingled vexation and weariness. His eyes were fixed on his brother Willie, and unconsciously he was listening to catch his voice and laugh. Presently a touch on his arm roused him.

"You are not going away yet, Michael?" said Maggie.

"I am waiting for Kate."

"I like to see her enjoying herself," said Maggie, looking with a pleased smile at Kate, as she danced merrily away, all her cares forgotten for the moment.

"I'm in no hurry," said Michael.

"It's all very tiresome to you, Cousin Michael, I am afraid."

Michael smiled. "Such merrymakings are not in my line. They suit some people—Willie, for instance. Maggie," he continued, "you know how that boy has been going on lately; now look at him."

Maggie did look, and then turned wistfully from Willie's handsome, careless face to the dark one of his brother.

"I know, Michael," she said, locking her hands together. "But you would not grudge him a little innocent pleasure like this?"

"No, indeed, Maggie—if all his pleasures were innocent." Michael paused.

"Be patient and gentle with him, Michael," pleaded Maggie, earnestly.

Michael shrugged his shoulders. "The old story!" he said, with a grave smile. "Maggie, do you know you are standing in a very cold place?"

"Yes," she said, starting; "and I ought to be seeing after the people."

An hour afterwards, Kate softly ascended the stairs of her own home, and cautiously opened her room door.

"Come in," said a cheerful voice, and Amy's little

white face smiled upon her as she went up to the bedside.

"Well, Katie?"

"Well, Amy, poor little one! I was so sorry you weren't there. Haven't you been asleep at all, dear?"

"Oh, I didn't mind. Aunt Miriam went to sleep in the arm-chair, and I have been listening for you. Was it great fun, Kate? Did you enjoy yourselves?"

"I think so," said Kate. "Yes, it was very merry; everyone liked it, except Michael. He looked so grave—not at all as if it were Christmas Eve."

"And is Christmas Eve not a grave day?" asked Michael's voice behind her.

"Yes, in one way. I don't know," said Kate, doubtfully. "You put things in such a way, Michael, and damp one so."

Michael smiled, and turned to Amy.

"Well, Amy, you ought to have been asleep hours ago, poor child!"

"She says she didn't mind;" and Kate knelt down, and smoothed the child's hair. "I wish she could have heard the music and the cheering."

"Amy can hear something better now," said Michael, crossing the room to the window. He listened for a moment, and then unfastened the lattice, and the distant sound of a peal of bells came mingled with the waves.

"Christmas Day has begun," said Michael, and they all listened silently.

"Maggie was here to-day," said Amy, softly, her eyes

fixed upon the bright stars that looked in through the open window.

"Dear Maggie!" said Kate, "what did she say?"

"She talked of Christmas," answered Amy.

"Did she? Do tell me what she said about it. Michael does not seem to think that Christmas is a time of rejoicing. It seems to me such a happy time, when people feel more kindly to each other, and the blessings of the year are counted up."

"Maggie said——" began Amy; but the door was opened again, and Willie looked in.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, "here you are, Kate! Isn't it time to go to bed? What are you doing? Telling Amy what a jolly evening we have had, or how glum Michael felt it his duty to look? Eh, what?" as Kate pointed to the window where Michael still stood listening to the midnight chimes.

"Rather cold for Amy, isn't it?" said Willie, carelessly, as he saw that his brother had overheard him. "Are we going to sit up all night, for fear of being late for church to-morrow?"

Michael closed the window. "It is time to go to bed," he said, shortly.

"Just what I said!" retorted Willie. "Good night, Michael. I hope your dancing hasn't tired you!"

"Good night," answered Michael.

Willie bent his handsome head over his little sister, and kissed her warmly several times; then wishing her pleasant dreams and a very merry Christmas, he left the

room, and Kate followed, to shut up the house and see after Aunt Miriam.

"Michael!" said Amy, rather timidly, as she was left alone with him.

Her brother came to the bed-side, pushed back the hair from his forehead, and sighed.

"You are tired, Mike," said the little girl.

"No, Amy." But the unerring child's instinct read the severe face aright. She looked at him wistfully, as he stood still beside her.

"Then I am not tired," she resumed. "I want to tell you what Maggie said to me about Christmas."

"Well, child." But the tone was not discouraging.

"Kneel down, Mike; here, where you can see that star—that bright one. Maggie called it the wise men's star." And as Michael obeyed, Amy went on, with one hand coaxingly smoothing his hair, to tell him in a low, murmuring tone, that Christmas story that never grows old, of the hill-side more than eighteen hundred years ago—of the sleeping shepherds and the angels' song—and of the treasure-laden travellers from the far East, led by a star which went before to guide them to where the young Child was. And for a time the true spirit of Christmas—the feeling of peace on earth, goodwill towards men, the thought of those glad tidings of great joy—came to soften the hard, stern spirit of Michael Leigh.

The new year dawned quietly upon the sea-side cottage. It seemed like the lull before a storm.

One dark night in January, when there was no moon, and the stars were buried in heaps of drifting clouds, Willie quietly lifted the latch of the house door, and looked out at the sky. The darkness seemed to satisfy him, he closed the door behind him as noiselessly as he had opened it, and began to ascend the rugged path that led along the cliff to the village. It was a very still night. The surf beat with monotonous regularity upon the beach, and Willie paused once or twice to look back and listen, fancying he heard other footsteps in the echo of his own. But the cottage stood silent and dark, except for a slender thread of red light streaming from the kitchen window, where Kate always left a candle burning when Michael was at sea. Willie went on rapidly, and disappeared round the point. Then he heard the subdued sound of voices, and the steps of many men on the road before him.

Shot after shot was fired that night in the woods of Maviswode Manor; but no sounds reached Kate as she lay sleeping by Amy's side, or Michael as his boat rocked on the black waters.

Geoffrey Brandon, the young gamekeeper, thought sadly of Maggie Weston as he and his father prepared to meet the poachers; and he could not look forward as his companions did to "a brush with the fellows before morning." That he should ever have to fight anyone whom Maggie loved!

The day broke cheerlessly over a grey sea flecked with foam. Kate wondered that Michael did not return home,

for she had seen the fishing-boats making for the land early in the morning.

About mid-day, when she was upstairs with Amy, she heard the cottage door open and close, and she went down to greet Michael.

He was sitting by the table, his arms crossed and his face buried upon them.

"Michael!" exclaimed Kate.

He did not move.

"Has anything happened? Michael, speak to me!"

She put her hand upon his shoulder, but he only moved away from the touch, and made no answer.

Kate trembled so that she had to grasp the back of his chair to support herself. Her next question was put in a very low voice.

"Michael, where is Willie?"

"Then you have not heard?" he said, looking up at her with a white, haggard face.

"Hush!" she interrupted—"Amy will hear." And she closed the door leading to the staircase.

"Everyone must hear soon," said Michael.

"Tell me!" said Kate, hoarsely.

"There was a fight last night between the gamekeepers and poachers up at Maviswode. A man has been killed."

"Not Willie?" whispered Kate.

"No, no—a watcher; there were others wounded. He wounded one."

"Where is he?"

"In prison by this time. There was a tremendous

struggle, but he was taken. Kate!" continued Michael, "it is my doing!"

"Your doing!"

"I drove him to it!—I have ruined him!"

"How can you think so, Michael?"

"Don't say it is not so," said Michael, more calmly—"I have done it."

Kate was still stunned enough to be very quiet. She sat down and began smoothing her apron mechanically, while Michael paced the floor with a heavy, uneven tread.

"What will they do to him?" she asked presently.

Michael groaned. "I can't tell. If Geoffrey Brandon, who they say he shot, dies——"

He paused suddenly, and a rapid shiver ran through Kate's veins.

"He won't die!" she gasped. "Oh, I am glad poor mother is dead!"

"Hush! Kate—hush! don't speak of her. Have you forgotten my promise to her—to be patient and merciful? Fine mercy I have shown!"

"You meant to do right," said Kate, frightened by his manner.

"Don't talk so. He warned me—poor boy, poor boy!" His whole frame shook with agony. "I drove him away, God forgive me! Didn't he come to me, poor fellow! and I threw him back upon those men?"

Kate could say nothing to comfort him.

"Too late now," he resumed, after a moment's pause.

"I see it all. He was led away; and I—he said I made his home miserable! No wonder."

With the restlessness of misery, Michael opened the cottage door, and looked out at the wild, dreary sea. The tide was coming in, and the waves chafing and fretting against the rocks. There was no light upon the fields of water, except a pale, faint sheen of silver near the horizon line. To Michael's cloud there seemed no silver lining. But when he turned back into the house, he saw that Kate was kneeling, and that her head was resting upon the open Bible. Michael knelt down beside her, and though no words came to him at first, yet even the attitude of prayer calmed him; and by-and-by he said, brokenly, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

Days and nights of sickening suspense followed. Michael sat for long hours bending over the fire, quite broken down with sorrow and remorse. The awakening from his dream of self-confidence and pitiless justice had been rude and sudden, and the torturing thought of what might have been if he had been different, was almost more than he could bear.

Maggie came from Longhurst, looking white and stricken. Kate held her in her arms, but neither spoke much after Maggie's whispered inquiry if they had heard of Willie.

For some days Geoffrey Brandon's life was in great danger. They heard that he had given Willie every chance of escape, and had tried hard to avoid an en-

counter with him, which poor Willie seemed to seek. He had fought to the last, and others coming up, Geoffrey could not prevent his being captured.

Maggie told Kate that, a few days before, her grandfather had spoken angrily to Willie, forbidding him to think any more of her, and ending by saying he hoped soon to see her married to Geoffrey Brandon.

"It made him desperate," said Kate, afterwards, to Michael.

"It was only one thing," answered Michael: "Maggie never need have given him up, if it hadn't been for my neglect."

"Maggie never did give him up," said Kate, a little indignantly.

"Then I have her unhappiness to answer for, too!" And Michael sighed more deeply than ever.

It was a gleam of comfort when Geoffrey Brandon was pronounced out of danger. "It seems wrong to be so much more glad because it is a good thing for Willie than for his own sake," said Kate.

"I am glad for him, too," said Maggie, with one of her sad smiles.

As the time of the trial drew on, Michael's restless misery seemed to increase. No one knew clearly what the sentence would be; but the band of poachers had been a desperate one, and the worst was feared. Such a lawless fight had not been known for years.

One evening, Maggie was sitting listlessly at the foot of a stile leading from Longhurst to the sea-shore, when she

saw a figure slowly approaching her along the hedge. It was Geoffrey Brandon, looking pale and weak, and carrying his arm in a sling.

Maggie rose, coloured deeply, and then involuntarily drew back.

"Won't you speak to me, Maggie?" he said, reproachfully.

"Indeed I will," she replied, recovering herself, and holding out her hand.

Geoffrey took it. "Maggie!" he began, speaking with an earnestness that made him almost eloquent, "it has been my worst pain, while I was ill, that you might think I would willingly have brought trouble upon anyone you care for. I have longed to be able to tell you. I would have given anything to save him. You will believe me, Maggie?"

"I do believe you," she answered. "We all know that you did your best for him; but oh, Geoffrey——"

"Yes," said Geoffrey, "I did not come here to speak about myself, but when I saw your face I could not bear that you should think ill of me. I am afraid it was selfish. Will you listen to me now? All the time I was ill I have been thinking how I could help him. It isn't much that I can do. I wish it was more. I am going away. I could tell them more about him, you see, at the trial than anyone; and I don't think I could help telling them anything they asked me. I'm such a stupid fellow," added Geoffrey, looking at Maggie apologetically.

She was listening breathlessly.

"So," he resumed, more slowly, "I thought if I went right away it might be a help. There would be one witness the less against him; and my being hurt, and all that, would tell against him in a trial, you see, Maggie. I'm going to-night."

"Oh, Geoffrey!—where to?"

"I—don't know," he answered, with a puzzled look. "But never fear for me; I shall be all right. No one knows it but you, Maggie. I left a scrap of paper for my father, to say I was gone—for change, I said. I didn't tell why or where."

"Geoffrey," said Maggie, almost sobbing, "oh, Geoffrey, what can I say to you?"

"Nothing," answered Geoffrey. "Why, Maggie, you know I've loved you all my life—do you think I wouldn't do such a little thing for you? But I didn't want to say anything about that," said Geoffrey, catching himself up again. "I have been wishing to tell you about this for ever so long, only I couldn't get about well—I was weak."

"You are not fit to go now," exclaimed Maggie, laying her hand on his arm.

"Yes, that I am," he answered, with a brave smile that was intended to cover a good deal of pain and weakness. "Strong as a horse, Maggie. And now, dear, good-bye—God bless you! I want to get away before father hears of it, or before I get one of those bits of paper that compel one to go to court," ended Geoffrey, vaguely.

Maggie scarcely knew what she did. She took both

his great hands in her own and kissed them, and saw Geoffrey's face looking bewildered and sorrowful as her hot tears fell upon his hand.

The next moment he was gone, walking steadily and without looking back, his knapsack on his shoulders, and one faithful dog following in his footsteps.

When Maggie told Michael, his eyes filled with tears. "Everyone is good to him except his brother," he said.

"But will it help him at the trial?" asked Maggie, eagerly.

Michael only shook his head.

But Willie had not thought his brother unkind when he went to see him in prison. At first Willie tried to keep up a show of the old carelessness of manner, but he changed suddenly, when he saw that Michael could scarcely speak to him.

"You are very good to come to me here," said Willie, his lip trembling.

Michael turned away, trying in vain to steady his voice.

Willie spoke again, with an effort that made the colour rush into his forehead.

"Michael, I have disgraced you. I am sorry——"

"It is not that——" began Michael; but the words failed, and he could only press his hand on Willie's shoulder. There was something in his brother's face that went to his heart—the dimmed blue eyes, the hopeless look, and the faint half-smile that wore no shadow of its former brightness. Michael turned away, unable to look at the

ruin he had helped to make ; and leaning his arm upon the wall and his head upon it, he sobbed aloud.

The time of the trial drew near. Perhaps, as Aunt Miriam said, they would "all feel better when it was over." It did not seem likely to themselves. Little Amy was not well, and partly from sorrow and fright about her brother, partly because no one had the heart to cheer her, she fretted incessantly, and cried whenever the least thing went wrong. The united troubles of Willie, Michael, and Amy, seemed to poor Kate a weight of sorrow greater than she could bear.

At Longhurst, Willie's name was a forbidden subject. Maggie tried hard to keep up, and to go about her daily work as usual. But one evening she bid her grandfather good-night early, talking of being very busy next day. He shook his head as he looked at the bright red spot on her white cheeks, and was not surprised when the next morning brought no Maggie. The poor old farmer stood sorrowfully beside her bed, hearing the name he had forbidden her to utter spoken unconsciously over and over again, and vainly begging her to lie still and try to go to sleep.

The doctor came, and looked grave ; the house grew very still, everyone treading cautiously and speaking in whispers. Aunt Miriam was sent for, and established herself in Maggie's room, tireless and helpful, never despairing, even upon that dreadful day when Doctor Graves had almost given up telling them to "wait a little," and

when Kate sat upon the stairs outside, crying too much to be allowed to go into the sick room.

Poor Kate! it was not Maggie's danger alone that had so broken her down that day.

Maggie awoke as if out of a long sleep, one quiet wintry afternoon, when the mists were wreathing themselves around the leafless trees, and the bark of a sheep-dog, a long way off on the downs, alone broke the stillness. Her grandfather stood watching her, and he smiled without speaking when her eyes met his. She looked from his face out at a bit of grey sky that showed through the half-shaded window, and then at the flickering fire for several minutes.

"Grandfather," she said at last, "I have been lying here a long time, haven't I?"

"Yes, dear—pretty long."

"Have you been very uncomfortable?" continued Maggie, moving her hand slowly towards him.

"Uncomfortable, Maggie? Why, no, not at all;—very comfortable."

The hesitation and caution of his answers seemed to perplex Maggie; she looked up more earnestly. Farmer Weston began to feel nervous. He had been told that much depended on this first waking, and he fancied he could manage it more quietly than the women, so he would call no one, though his heart secretly misgave him, as Maggie's placid look faded under the return of consciousness.

"Grandfather," she resumed, putting her weak hand

up to her forehead, "isn't there something dreadful hanging over us? I can't remember."

"No, my dear—nothing," asserted the farmer, stoutly. She spoke again, so suddenly that he quite jumped.

"The trial!—I know now. Oh, when is it?"

"Don't worry yourself about it; lie still, my dear. The trial is over, Maggie."

"Over! Oh, when—when?"

"My dear, a week ago—the day you were at the worst."

"Grandfather, tell me!" gasped Maggie.

"Not now, my dear. We must be quiet, and not talk."

And Farmer Weston, feeling very prudent and judicious, turned away, and pretended to poke the fire.

Maggie almost screamed.

"You must tell me, grandfather! Grandfather, come!"

"Well, my dear, well. Yes, I am coming. Do lie down, Maggie; I will tell you. He is transported for twenty years!"

Maggie turned away, and hid her eyes from the light. Her grandfather bent over her, full of anxiety.

"Don't fret," he said, presently; "pray don't, Maggie. Willie took it very quietly, he did indeed. He asked after you directly Michael got to him, when it was over."

But Maggie did not hear. Farmer Weston hurried down stairs to confess what he had done, and to send for the doctor; and a week afterwards, when Maggie knew anyone again, it was not her grandfather who answered her first questions. He could hardly be got into her room, and when there, kissed her hand humbly, and would not speak.

The day before Willie's removal from the county gaol to the convict-ship, Kate saw him to say good-bye. It was a damp, chilly evening, the rain was falling heavily, and it was nearly dark when they came to summon her away from him.

She had been with him for two hours ; she had sat beside him, her head resting on his shoulder, and had heard the familiar voice calling her "dear Katie!"—the voice that she could scarcely believe had been once so gay.

They had talked a little of Maggie, though Willie seemed to think himself unworthy to speak her name. He carried her letter of farewell near his heart—a letter so like herself, that it had calmed the bitterness of his grief. It spoke of hope for him, and trust in him even yet. "Give her my love," whispered Willie—"my last love ; for she must not be *my* Maggie any longer!"

He spoke of Amy, and of his mother, and sent messages to any of those who had loved him who would care to be remembered by such a one as he was.

"Above all, Kate, comfort Michael!" he said. And now Michael, who had left them alone together, returned, and told them that the last moment had come.

Sobbing uncontrollably, Kate drew him to the window, that the faint light might fall through the grating upon the beautiful face, her mother's pride, that she was parting with, probably for ever ! Michael averted his eyes, and, without looking, gave a little worn Bible into his brother's hand. It had been his companion on land and sea for

years, and the pages were all stained with salt water. "Read it," he said. No more words would come.

"My love to the little one. And oh! Kate—sister—say to Maggie——"

Kate had reached the door, and looked back at her brothers. Michael and Willie grasped each other's hands; but the next moment Willie had thrown his arms round his brother, and the dark strong head was bowed upon his shoulder.

He was gone. They scarcely realized what it would be without him, until the dreary excitement was over, and they had settled down into the semblance of their former life.

Then everybody seemed to miss him. Angry with him as Farmer Weston still was, he often sighed heavily as he plodded alone across the fields that used to echo Willie's merry whistle, or stood in the farmyard looking up at the tall hayricks which he had helped to build. The old yardsman drew his coat-sleeve across his eyes sometimes, when the horses in the stable pricked their ears and looked round wistfully, missing the hand and voice they all knew. And the shepherd's children, some of them little things who could scarcely toddle, could not be made to understand why their mother said "hush!" when they asked for Willie, and why they might not shout for him to give them a ride on his shoulder, or a game at hide-and-seek in the barn.

At home, his dog Ruffian led a life of perpetual watch-

fulness and disappointment, listening for the step that never came. Kate found a sort of comfort in sitting down to cry over him, with her arms round his shaggy neck ; but Rough, after a few blundering attempts to lick her tearful face, would raise an imaginary alarm of Willie, and rush off barking.

All his possessions were laid aside with loving care. A queer set of treasures: his stick, the knife with which he used to carve old men's heads for Amy, an old pipe, the smart blue tie—Maggie's gift—that he always wore on Sunday, and a few marbles, long kept in his pocket from some boyish association. It was one of Amy's sad pleasures to have the drawer where they lay, open near her bed, and to look at them and touch them.

The two first years of Willie's exile passed slowly away, with no great events to mark them. In the second spring, an uncle, whom they knew but little, died, and left all his savings to Michael. They were not large, but they seemed riches to the fisherman's family; and the first thought of Kate and Michael was for the absent one whom their good fortune would not profit.

The brother and sister went together to attend their uncle's funeral.

"Kate," began Michael, breaking a long silence as they walked home along the cliffs, "I have something to say to you."

"Have you?" said Kate; adding, as she looked up at Michael, "is it about Willie?"

"Yes; but it concerns you too. But for leaving you and Amy unprovided for, I should have followed him long ago. You would be well off now, Kate. Do you understand me?"

"You want to go to him?" said Kate, in a low voice.

"It is my one wish. I can never tell you how thankful I am for this money, which seems sent to clear the way for me."

"Would they let you see Willie?" asked Kate.

"I believe so, at times. This is no new thought to me, though it comes suddenly upon you. There are some things I must say to him. Shall I, who helped to ruin him, make no effort to help him? Besides, Kate"—and his voice sunk,—“have you forgotten my promise to my mother?"

Michael so seldom mentioned Willie, that Kate knew how strong the feeling must be that made him speak now. He had grown very silent in the last two years, and only his gentleness and extreme fear of finding fault, showed that the ever-abiding memory was with him still.

"I long to speak to him," he resumed, "and to try to show him that the religion I made him think so hard and narrow is a religion of love—that the Master whom I serve is one who has bid us suffer long and be kind—that He who has forgiven me so much, has mercy too for him."

He paused, and added more calmly: "I leave it to you, Kate—you shall decide. If you can let me go, and bid me God speed, I shall thank you as long as I live; if

you say no, I shall see that God has not seen right to give me the comfort of trying in some measure to atone for the past."

Kate looked up at her brother, and read in his face the intense earnestness of his one wish. For the moment the sense of loneliness was lost in the feeling of thankfulness that Willie would be comforted.

"Go, Michael," she said quietly.

"God will reward you, Kate!" he answered.

By-and-by he told her of the arrangements he had thought of making. Kate listened as if in a dream. The old cottage by the sea-shore was to be given up. Kate and Amy were to go and live in lodgings with some one who would take the greatest care of them. Their uncle's money would be enough to make them comfortable; the sale of the cottage and the fishing-boat would pay for Michael's voyage.

"You are doing more for him than I am," said Michael, as he listened to the quivering voice which Kate tried so hard to make cheerful and business-like.

"I?" said Kate; "oh, no! But, Michael, how glad Maggie will be!"

"Then you think I am right, Kate? You can really say you wish me to go, not for my own comfort, but because I have a message for him, that I must deliver. I hoped he was trying to find the light before he went away; but if no hand holds it up to him, will he ever find it? God is great, Kate; but does he not bid us work as well as pray?"

"Yes," said Kate, carried away by his earnestness. "You

asked me if I could say God speed you—from my heart I can."

It was hard work telling little Amy. The preparations were getting forward before they dared break it to her ; for she was a tender little plant, and the strongest fibres of her nature had wound themselves round her brothers.

When at last Michael told her very gently, she only clasped him closely. "Don't go, Mike—oh, don't go away too!"

"But, Amy ——"

"Oh, stay at home, Mike—stay with us!"

Michael looked distressed. The little one had drooped sadly since Willie's departure.

"Amy," said Kate, gently, "listen. If you could please Willie very much, and comfort him—if you could send him the best thing you had yourself—would you not like to do it?"

The child listened attentively, but clung more closely to Michael as Kate's meaning reached her.

"You would like Willie to know how much we love him," continued her sister ; "would not our giving up Michael be the greatest thing we could do to show it to him?"

Kate's own voice faltered, and Amy hid her face in her hands.

"Tell Willie how very much we love him," she said at last, trying to smile as she lifted up her face to kiss Michael.

It was late in autumn before all was ready for his departure. The cottage was no longer their own ; Jack Humphreys and his wife were coming soon to live there, and the sea would dash and moan in other ears than theirs. One evening, Michael watched the old boat put to sea without him, and he turned back to sit for the last time with Kate in the familiar chimney-corner. The farewells were nearly all spoken. Maggie had told him how she should pray for him in his far-off work.

"Dear Michael, I am so glad, and so thankful!" she said, smiling and holding out her thin hands to Michael.

He and Kate walked back from Longhurst along the path that Willie used to tread so often, and thought of him at every step of the way.

They reached Plymouth the following day, and Michael saw his sisters safely established under the motherly care of an old friend of his father's, Mrs. Harding. There he left them. Kate stayed with him to the last moment, and only parted with him on board the emigrant ship.

It was early morning, and the sun was rising over the waves ; the moment for sailing was almost come, but Kate still stood by her brother's side. They said but little, only a short sentence now and then about the fine weather or the favourable wind. The parting words could not be spoken easily, and they watched almost in silence, as boat after boat carried away the people who had come to bid their friends good-bye on board. Most of the passengers stood in groups together. There were many excited faces ; some of the women were sobbing ; but as Kate looked

round upon them all, it seemed to her that none were so much alone as the brother she was leaving.

"You must go, Kate," said Michael, at last. "The last boat is leaving the ship."

He held her for one moment in his arms, and whispered a few words, which poor Kate could scarcely listen to. Then he took her down the ship's side, and placed her in the boat, lingering to fold her shawl more closely round her. "It is cold on the water this morning," he said. "Take care of yourself, dear Kate."

The faithful hand was withdrawn from hers—the guardian brother was parted from her. Michael sprang back on to the deck, and Kate bowed down her head as the first strokes of the oars carried them away. By-and-by they paused, and she looked up. The great ship was moving. A cheer rose from the boats around, echoed wildly and brokenly from the departing vessel.

The crowd of people going forth to seek their fortune in a new world were pressing eagerly to the ship's side, and looking back toward the shore. Somewhat apart from these, with the flush of morning light falling all around him, Kate could still see the solitary, resolute figure, whose one hope was, to be the bearer of a message of mercy to that far-distant land. And so the emigrant ship passed on her outward way.

Michael Leigh saw Willie again for the first time among a gang of convicts returning from their work. Walking slowly behind them came a slight, stooping figure, in the

prison dress, with a face whose quiet hopelessness was strange to see in one so young.

Michael went to him, but Willie seemed scarcely to understand or to believe that it could be his brother.

"Michael?" he said, in an uncertain voice, putting his hand out doubtfully to touch Michael's arm. "Michael? You can't have come all this way because of me?"

"You are ill, Willie!" exclaimed Michael, grasping the shaking hand.

"Am I? It doesn't matter much!" returned Willie, with a sort of smile. "Did you come to see me, Michael?"

Maggie would hardly have recognised her young lover, for the two years of remorse and home-sickness, the degradation, and the loss of her, were fast breaking his heart.

He took little heed of the comfort that his brother would fain have given him, but put it from him with a listless hopelessness, or listened only because it was Michael who spoke.

"I cannot hope to be forgiven," he would say, drearily. "I did not do wrong from ignorance, like so many of the poor fellows here."

Michael could only pray for him, as he saw him growing daily weaker.

"You think I am going to die?" Willie asked one day.

"I am afraid so. I know the doctor thinks so," answered Michael, steadily.

"It is so like you to tell me, dear old fellow!" said Willie, a faint gleam of amusement crossing his face. "Well," he continued, in a changed tone, "perhaps it is

the best thing I could do. But I should have died more quietly if you had let me alone."

Once more Michael spoke "the message" he had come so far to deliver, and told of peace and pardon through Him who was sent to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound.

"Michael, I understand at last," Willie said, one day. "The chaplain has been talking to me, and I told him all you had been to me, how ungrateful I had been, and of your wonderful love. He only answered me by saying, 'How much more shall your Heavenly Father give good gifts to them that ask him?' and then, Michael, I understood that your glad tidings could really be for me."

It was a great joy to Michael that the love he had so long withheld was permitted to be the type which brought home the far greater Love to his brother. He accepted it as a proof of full forgiveness, and thanked God for the lightening of his sorrow.

Willie lived for some time yet, going on patiently with his work until he grew too ill to stand, and then he lay down with contented weariness to die. Michael was allowed to be much with him towards the end, and to watch his deepening repentance and his brightening faith. Maggie could scarcely have nursed him more tenderly, or his mother have watched over him with such untiring love. It was he who shared his last Communion, and received the whispered messages for those at home.

Willie died in the prison hospital, with strange sights

and voices round him. But Michael was there, the only earthly comfort his brother cared to have.

"Stand there, Michael," he said, when the end was very near, "that your face may be the last thing that I shall ever see."

Michael obeyed, standing where the dim lamplight—for it was near midnight—fell upon him ; and except once, when Willie looked and pointed upwards, the darkening eyes never wandered from his face. Michael was full of pity for him, that he should die far away from the gentle womanly care of those who had so loved him. Once he bent down and kissed him for Maggie and his sisters. Willie smiled, and feebly tried to find his hand that he might hold it to his heart. The night passed very quietly. Now and then a warder or one of the nurses came silently up to the bedside and looked at the dying man ; but before the grey light of a new morning had forced its way through the barred windows, there was no need to watch him any more. The prisoner was free.

Michael's task was ended, yet he remained on in Australia. A strange bond of brotherhood and pity drew him to Willie's fellow-convicts. Amid the crowds of emigrants, also, which every vessel brought out from England, there were many suffering and friendless, and among them he had found his work. He stayed on, finding employment daily thicken on his hands ; and in time there came tidings from home, that made him feel that there was no duty calling him back there now.

Willie's early death had been deeply mourned in England. For a long time Kate, at least, felt as if life could have neither brightness nor interest left in it for her. She only longed to be with Maggie, whose sorrow must be even greater than her own.

Mrs. Harding did her best to comfort the two sisters. She was a widow, with a kind, gentle face and an absent manner, which, indeed, was but natural, for her thoughts were generally far away, following the track of the ship on board which her only son was mate. George was the hero of her life—the safe return of the “Nancy” the goal of all her hopes. She talked of him all day; but then everybody praised George Harding, until Kate was almost tired of the sound of his name.

When he came at last, she thought that the whole place had turned out to meet him. Kate shut herself up in Amy's room, and only forgave him the excitement he was causing, for the sake of the brightness she supposed he would bring to his mother.

Not to his mother alone it was fated that George Harding should bring brightness. It was autumn when he arrived, yet somehow the sunshine of spring-time seemed to have come back with him. Kate began to hope that the “Nancy's” owners would not soon send her on a fresh voyage—Mrs. Harding was so happy with her son. The “Nancy,” however, was too good a ship to be left long unemployed. The last day on shore came wonderfully soon.

The evening before the “Nancy” was to sail, Amy

Leigh lay alone on her couch in the firelight, working hard to finish a red comforter for George Harding to take to sea with him.

It grew so dusk that she could no longer see the stitches, and laying down her knitting-needles, she waited rather indignantly for Kate. She and George Harding came in at last together.

"Oh, there you are!" Amy began. "You have kept Kate out walking so long, that the comforter you asked for will not be ready in time."

"I'm very sorry. But, Amy, do you know that I have been asking Kate to give me a parting gift, too?"

"Kate has got nothing for you," said Amy, decidedly.

"Are you sure she hasn't? Oh, Amy!"—and George knelt down by the couch, and took one of her hands—"do you know that all my happiness is in your little hands?"

Amy looked up startled at Kate. She was smiling and blushing, though the tears were in her eyes.

"Do you mean——?" began Amy, and then stopped.

"Yes," answered George, "I mean it all. Kate says I must get your consent."

"Kate, come to me." Her little sister drew her down until she could put both arms round her neck. "Katie, you would love me just the same?"

"Love you!" whispered Kate, bursting into tears. "Love you, Amy! Oh, nobody knows how much!"

So when the "Nancy" sailed next day, Kate's heart and Amy's red comforter both went with it.

They stayed on with Mrs. Harding, to whom her son's

future wife was something quite set apart from the rest of the world. At the end of George's next voyage, he and Kate were married. Before that time, Michael's warm letter of congratulation had arrived from Australia. Kate had only needed his words of approval and pleasure to make her cloudlessly happy.

George was fond of little Amy, and very kind to her. Perhaps she was rather jealous of Kate's love for him at first—not for herself, but for those to whom her heart clung so faithfully. She was not proof, however, against his sailor's tenderness, and long before her death she had grown to call him "brother"—that sacred name of the past that had belonged to Michael and to Willie. For Time, the great physician, failed to work the miracle that Kate had fondly hoped for. By-and-by, Amy grew to talk less of the parting with her brothers here, and to think more of meeting them in heaven.

Hundreds of miles of ocean waves still roll between Kate and Michael, but they both hope that their brother and their little sister have met again.

Let us take one more look at Kate before we leave her. She is sitting by the fireside in her own home. The room is full of curiosities from foreign parts, and just now is cosily lighted by the fire.

The wind and rain are dashing against the windows, and every few minutes the whole house seems to shake, as a heavier wave than usual beats upon the shore near at hand. Kate lets the storm have its own wav to-night

without a thought, only now and then she glances with double satisfaction at George's cap on the table among her tea-things. By this time poor Kate knows some of the sorrows as well as the pleasures of being a sailor's wife. But George is at home now. She can hear his step and his whistle overhead.

She is not alone downstairs. She has two companions, and George thinks them far more marvellous and delightful than any of the travellers' wonders he has ever seen.

There can be no difficulty in telling who the little dark-eyed fellow standing by her knee is like. He is a miniature of his father, and the darling and pride of old Mrs. Harding.

But what likeness is Kate so intently tracing in the tiny face nestled upon her arm?

Sometimes, when it looks up at her with baby earnestness and gravity, she softly calls it "little Michael." When it opens its blue eyes with a smile, she holds it closer to her heart and thinks of Willie. To-night, as it lies sleeping, she bends down towards the firelight, and the thought of one who not long ago fell asleep for ever in her arms, comes peacefully across her. Two or three quiet tears fall upon the little face. But her eldest son puts up his rosy lip at the sight, and shows unmistakable signs of not allowing her to cry alone. So Kate lays the baby down in the cradle by the fire, and taking little George upon her knee, begins a long murmuring story, that he knows almost as well as she does, about Longhurst Farm, and mother's little sister.

Long after her marriage, when Time's softening hand had blotted out the harsh colours from the past, and the grass was growing thickly on Willie's distant grave, Kate sent for Geoffrey Brandon. When he came, she gave him a letter from Michael to read. It was the account of Willie's illness and death, a long letter and very touching. Kate turned away while Geoffrey slowly, and presently through blinding tears, read the story of his dead rival's last days. He came to one sentence, and there paused. It was Willie's dying message to Maggie, bidding her good-bye, and begging her to forgive all the sin and sorrow which had cast such a black shadow upon her life. He mentioned Geoffrey, and bade God bless him for his kindness. "One of the last things he said," wrote Michael, "and the most earnest, was, 'Tell her to make him happy some day.'"

"Does Maggie know of this?" asked Geoffrey.

"Yes," answered Kate, "she read the letter. Geoffrey," she continued, laying her hand on his, "you were very good to *him*, and we are very grateful. Will you go to Longhurst?"

Geoffrey went, full of a new hope that almost bewildered him. He and Maggie met very quietly, but some words of his, spoken long ago, were ringing in both their hearts:—

"If you are in trouble or lonely, Maggie, send for me. If ever you could care for a love like mine, strong as life, and faithful till death, let me come back to you."

"Maggie," he said now, almost in a whisper, "I have seen a letter from Michael Leigh."

Maggie turned half away, and the tears sprang into her eyes. He could scarcely see her face, but her attitude was sad, and she had grown very pale. Geoffrey drew back and thought a moment. Yes, he saw it clearly. Dear, noble Maggie! she would try to make him happy, if he asked her, but it would not be happy for herself. He must help her. So he walked to the window, and stood there, trying to wrestle down the strong temptation, and to think of the words so difficult to find that would set Maggie at rest.

"Maggie," he began, quite calmly at last,—“it was very noble of him to send that message, and you—it is like an angel, as you always were; but,”—he was dismayed by finding that his voice gave way; he steadied it resolutely, and went on—“but it was too much to ask of you. He would not wish it, if he knew what a rough fellow I am, Maggie.” Here was another pause, and then he began again, earnestly: “I am very happy—very happy now. I am used to being alone. So don't fret over that message, dear, but think how I got happy—all from loving you—even without you. More happy now than ever, dear Maggie, for your kindness. But you mustn't try to do more, even for his sake.”

He took up his hat, for he felt suffocating, and the sooner he was away after that speech, the better.

“Are you going?” said Maggie, looking up.

He never knew how it happened, but the next moment

he was beside Maggie, kneeling down, and grasping both her hands. His hat was rolling away into a corner of the room, and a new life was opening before him.

"Maggie, is it true? Can you? May I try if I can comfort you?"

"It has been very lonely, Geoffrey," whispered Maggie. "Let it be as he wished."

And thus it came that faithful, unselfish love won back love at last.

The news of Kate's engagement, and later of Amy's death, fixed Michael's lot for life where he had found his work.

Once, when a homeward-bound vessel had nearly reached the harbour, and the returning voyagers were gladly gazing at the land, I, the humble seagull who have told this story, rested on the ship's side, and listened to the last words I ever heard spoken of Michael Leigh.

Two passengers who had known him well were speaking. No welcome ever greeted him (they said) in the solitary room he went to late at night, and left again in the early morning; but his real home was in the dwellings of the poor, and by the bedside of the dying.

Few would have believed you, if you had spoken of him as harsh and severe once; for it was with the erring that he was especially gentle—to the unstable and wavering that his great patience and his untiring earnestness were the most called forth.

The dark, grave face—old-looking for his years, but

full of peace—and the deep voice, softened to a wonderful tenderness, carried hope and comfort to many weary hearts. Not in the stern spirit of atonement or self-sacrifice, but from a heart overflowing with love, the English fisherman had left all to follow Christ.

He always carried with him the little worn Bible that had been with him for so long, and which he had once parted with in the darkest hour of his life.

Familiar as all its words were to him, there was one place at which the leaves fell open of themselves. Michael Leigh's best-loved passage was one generally appropriate to his hearers, and always to his own thoughts—the story of the Prodigal Son.

Often as he read it, the consolation that it brought to himself and others was always new to him, and he never failed to pause with deep thankfulness on its concluding words:—

“It was meet that we should make merry and be glad, for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”



The story was finished. There was nothing to be heard but the quick ripple of the waves. Effie did not move: she still sat with her chin resting on her hand, looking down into the clear water, as if fascinated.

The sky and sea and the wet sands seemed changed into molten gold. A horse and cart, with some men standing round it, far out upon the beach, looked dark and unreal, as if they were moving through a flood of orange light. Flights of seagulls came from the cliffs above, and sank down on to the radiant waves. A flock of starlings hurried across the sky, high over Effie's head, shifting like a black and silver riband as they flew. A cock crew shrilly from some farmyard far away; and the rooks were cawing as they only do at sunset.

"How restless you all are!" said Effie, slowly, to a little bird that skimmed past her. "Why can't you be quiet? Always flying hither and thither!"

"You too, Effie, will fly away some day," answered the swallow who had once told her his story.

"I? oh no, never!" Effie looked down again into the rocking water with a smile.

It was a wonderful evening. Effie went slowly up the cliffs. Even here the tinge of gold was shining on all around, and the great trunks of the trees were lighted up.

Grave thoughts filled Effie's mind. She thought of the golden City where her mother was, and almost fancied that its gates must be a little open, and some of its glory streaming upon sea and land. Before she left the wood, she knelt down and said her evening prayers.

Afterwards she went on more lightly, planning a long expedition to the hazel wood to-morrow, to see what promise there was for nuts this autumn.

A servant met her as she reached the house. She was to go to the library directly.

Surely nothing had happened ? Nothing ever happened here.

Effie opened the heavy oak door, and noiselessly crossed the room.

"Uncle Walter!"

He turned and looked up at her. No, nothing had happened—at least, nothing very important. A letter had come from Effie's father. It lay beside Uncle Walter now—not a long letter, yet that little leaf of folded paper was to change Effie's life.

Her father had sent for her.

"He is at Innsbruck," said Uncle Walter, referring to the letter, "waiting for you to join him. He has sent his courier to fetch you, and he wishes you to lose no time in going to him. You had better start to-morrow morning early. Stay! the courier brought some one else from Paris to go with you—Rosalie, I think your father says, your poor mother's old maid."

Through all the bewilderment of her thoughts there

rushed a vision into Effie's mind of a pair of very black, kind eyes, and of a shrill voice that used to call her "*mon ange*," and tell her fairy tales.

"You will like to go abroad, Effie?" said Uncle Walter, kindly, opening one book and then another as he spoke.

"Shall I?" said Effie, dreamily.

"Certainly," resumed Uncle Walter, "and to be with your father. He says he will keep you among the mountains until the cool weather comes. He will show you the Tyrol, and in the winter he means to go to Italy."

"To Italy!"

"Yes, or to the Mediterranean. You need not stay now, Effie. The courier has orders not to lose a moment; so mind you are ready. Here! I had forgotten. Your father sends you this note."

Effie took it, and left the library. She read her father's letter by the faded remnants of the sunset, and then flung herself upon the grass, and sobbed, murmuring—"Oh, my friends!—my friends!"

Aunt Lettice sent some one to look for her, and the rest of the evening was spent beside her sofa, listening to her soft voice as she talked on about "Edmund's sudden way of doing things," and poor dear little Effie's fatiguing journey.

Effie fell half asleep, and knew that Aunt Lettice kissed her and said, "Yes, take the poor little dear up to bed."

Left alone in her room at last, with the moonlight pouring in, Effie's tears fell again heavily. They would all miss her to-morrow: they would listen for her in vain.

Grave thoughts filled Effie's mind. She thought of the golden City where her mother was, and almost fancied that its gates must be a little open, and some of its glory streaming upon sea and land. Before she left the wood, she knelt down and said her evening prayers.

Afterwards she went on more lightly, planning a long expedition to the hazel wood to-morrow, to see what promise there was for nuts this autumn.

A servant met her as she reached the house. She was to go to the library directly.

Surely nothing had happened? Nothing ever happened here.

Effie opened the heavy oak door, and noiselessly crossed the room.

"Uncle Walter!"

He turned and looked up at her. No, nothing had happened—at least, nothing very important. A letter had come from Effie's father. It lay beside Uncle Walter now—not a long letter, yet that little leaf of folded paper was to change Effie's life.

Her father had sent for her.

"He is at Innsbruck," said Uncle Walter, referring to the letter, "waiting for you to join him. He has sent his courier to fetch you, and he wishes you to lose no time in going to him. You had better start to-morrow morning early. Stay! the courier brought some one else from Paris to go with you—Rosalie, I think your father says, your poor mother's old maid."

Through all the bewilderment of her thoughts there

The screech owls from the ivied walls answered her with mournful cries.

But another voice comes stealing through the stillness. Surely the nightingale never sang with such sweet power before!

What? Effie rose up in her bed to listen. What did the nightingale tell her? That her father was lonely? That he needed her? That long ago a great sorrow had almost wrecked his life—that it was her blessed part now to win him back by her love to hope, home, duty? Would she not go to him gladly?

There was a pause. Effie sat up still, with a new light upon her face. Hush! once more, and now with such a thrill of sadness through the tones. Where did the nightingale learn those words? They are written in her father's letter: they lay underneath her pillow now.

"My child—my dear Effie, I have been away from you too long. I ought never to have left you. One, whom you remember—whom we both love—left us to each other. You are my dearest, my only treasure now. Little Effie, come to me, and be my comfort!"

Effie thought to go away with no farewells; she was mistaken. Early as it was, Uncle Walter kissed her forehead, placed her in the carriage, and uttered a grave "Good-bye!"

And her own friends, the birds? The nightingale must surely have told them she was going, for as the carriage passed on through the wood, it rang with choruses of farewell. The little throats must have been almost broken

that sang those loud, sweet messages of good-will. They were all there, all Effie's friends—all!

"Hark!" said Rosalie, as they drove along. "Ah, *quel dommage!* only listen to the birds! They are saying good morning to the sun."

But Effie knew better than that.

Three long years came and went before Effie watched another sunset from the Manor-house.

But one winter's evening the footsteps, light as ever, though so long unheard, trod the old terrace again. Effie had returned.

She and her father stood together where so often she had stood alone. All day there had been wild waves to seaward, and a wind keen, shrill, shrewd, laden with drenching spray. Long rollers hurried in from the horizon, and churned themselves into foam upon the ledge of rocks. But now, just before his setting, the sun broke for a few minutes through the heavy clouds; the whole heaven was one canopy of crimson and blue, amber and purple, mountains with scarlet crests and bases of burnished gold.

Effie stood with both her hands clasped over her father's arm. To look and to enjoy alone, was not sufficient for her now. Every moment her eyes were raised

to his face—that quiet, firm face, which looked as if a storm of sorrow had swept across it once, but which never failed to meet Effie's eyes with a smile almost as bright as her own.

Time seemed to Effie to have stood still at home. Aunt Lettice's fire blazed brilliantly to-day. She herself, leaning far back in a great arm-chair, knitting-needles in hand, and a mass of soft scarlet wool upon her lap, looked the picture of languid contentment. Effie and her father peeped into the library as they passed. But for a few more books piled up on the table, a few more papers scattered on the floor, Effie could have believed that it was only yesterday she had last been standing there. There may have been an additional line or two on Uncle Walter's forehead, as he raised his head for a moment; perhaps he stooped a little more than he used—that was all.

But to Effie everything was changed. Her father had seen all her old haunts to-day. As patiently as formerly he had listened to the stories, he now visited the spots where they had been told, and listened to Effie's eager comments.

It all appeared very silent and dreary; for she remembered the woods last, ringing with mirth and song, and the stream rippling over with musical waters. It was frozen over now.

"Here it all is again," she said, "the dear old place! There is the birch-tree, with its branches frozen into the ice, where the sparrow said Curly had built her nest. I

wonder whether poor Joe has been lost in a London fog by this time, or turned into an icicle on his tree. I dare say the swallow has the best of it now; perhaps he is spending Christmas with 'Old Jem' somewhere at the Antipodes. Look, father! yonder is the rock where I sat while the seagull told me that very long story. Don't you remember I told you what a lovely evening it was, the day before I went away?"

"I remember," said her father.

"The birds were very kind and good to me when I was lonely. Even the peacock, to whom I used to be so cold, told me quite a nice story about hope and patience. Come and see him on the terrace, father."

They went round the house, and faced the wind and the sunset.

"It was here I first heard their voices," resumed Effie, laying a detaining hand upon her father's arm—"just here; and Uncle Walter stood there, looking so puzzled."

Effie's merry laugh rang on the air; her father smiled too.

"Did you ever hear why I sent for you, three years ago?" he asked.

"No, father—never."

"Uncle Walter wrote to me. He said you lived too much alone, that you were unhappy—growing fanciful. He said you startled him, and that some one ought to look after you."

"So it was the birds that made you send for me, after all!" exclaimed Effie, triumphantly. "They startled Uncle

Walter ! My faithful little friends, how happy they have made me !”

“ Will they ever speak to you again, Effie ?”

“ I am afraid not,” said Effie, a momentary shade crossing her bright face. “ No, I suppose not. I am afraid they think I am too happy to want them any more. But I shall always be grateful. They will still be my friends, you know. I shall always love them, father—always.”







